AMES K. GALBRAITH ON A PROGRESSIVE ECONOMIC POLICY

The Nation.

BLAMING IRAN
The Editors
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exander Cockburn

McCAIN'S DEFEAT IN ARIZONA
Max Blumenthal

THE DEATH OF MR. LEBANON
Annia Ciezadlo

'TRANSCENDING' RACE

OBAMA AND THE AMERICAN DILEMMA

PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

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LETTERS

R.O. BLECHMAN

FSG: NO PRESSURE HERE

New York City

■ Farrar, Straus & Giroux appreciates Alexander Cockburn's and *The Nation*'s support of our forthcoming publication of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* ["Beat the Devil," Feb. 5]. We would like to clarify one point, however. While individuals have expressed unhappiness about our decision to publish this work, to our knowledge there has been no campaign to pressure the house "to abandon its publication," as Cockburn seems to suggest. Indeed, we made this clear to *The Nation*'s fact-checker when asked specifically about the issue.

ERIC CHINSKI
Farrar, Straus & Giroux

With figures as prominent as Alan Dershowitz and ADL national director Abe Foxman publicly criticizing FSG for signing the book, and since FSG acknowledged having received calls urging them to drop it, Alexander Cockburn's comment that "pressure is now being exerted" on FSG passed muster with us. —*The Editors*

ACLU'S HOUSE DIVIDED

Newark, NJ

■ As one of the longest-serving members of the ACLU national board (thirty-seven years), I appreciate Scott Sherman's comprehensive review of recent internal friction ["ACLU v. ACLU," Feb. 5]. He accurately describes the phenomenal growth and success of the organization over the past five years, thus implicitly acknowledging the extraordinary leadership of executive director Anthony Romero and president Nadine Strossen, as well as the hard work and dedication of hundreds of national and affiliate ACLU employees. Also implicit is the fact that some people do not deal well with institutional renewal, clinging to the past and criticizing the agents of change. I believe that dynamic is at work here.

Certainly Romero, who came to the ACLU from the foundation world, has made a few missteps. Initially, he did not fully comprehend the culture of the ACLU and the eighty-three-member national board's stubborn insistence on organizational oversight. But he is a fast learner and now has won the overwhelming support of this often fractious board. Still, for reasons hard to fathom, the handful of remaining oppositionists refuse to forgive his past trespasses and continue to exaggerate them.

One of the most outrageous canards spread by the so-called dissidents is the claim that Romero and his closest advisers attempted to purge the ACLU of opponents and muzzle dissent within the organization. I can testify to the falsity of that charge from personal experience. I have served as an ACLU general counsel for thirty-one years, and during most of that tenure I have been very vocal about my strong opposition to ACLU policy on political campaign-finance regulation. Indeed, during my very first meeting with Romero, I told him that it was one of my main goals to overthrow that policy, which he strongly supported. Never has Romero or anyone on the board attempted to muzzle me, and indeed, I have been re-elected each year as general counsel.

The ACLU executive committee and national board have logged many, many hours debating and discussing the internal issues Sherman reviews. These matters have all been resolved in ways that reflect the values and priorities of the ACLU, which remains primarily focused on the extraordinarily serious threats to civil liberties that exist today. FRANK ASKIN

New York City

■ I write concerning the controversy surrounding Anthony Romero, particularly his acceptance of foundation funds on the condition that the ACLU not "promote...violence, terrorism, bigotry or the destruction of any state."

When I came to the NYCLU as a staff lawyer in 1965, it was just beginning to confront its ignoble record of the McCarthy years. It no longer appended to its briefs a statement involving the Communist Party, assuring the court that the ACLU did not favor violent overthrow of the government; it quietly withdrew its prohibition against hiring Communists; it was on its way to recognizing the injustice of its removal from the board of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn because she was a CP member; and it was engaging in some soul searching about its cooperation with J. Edgar Hoover.

Anyone who remembers those times and understands how seriously they compromised the ACLU's work would be horrified at the idea that it would allow a foundation to condition funds on the ACLU's pledge not to do anything to "promote" terrorism. In making that pledge, Romero displayed more than ignorance of ACLU history; he legitimized the "war on terror" the same way the ACLU legitimized McCarthyism fifty years ago.

The ACLU is challenging the "war on terror" with uncompromising vigor, as it challenged the government during the McCarthy era. But in the political battle during that era, the ACLU was fatally compromised, becoming something of a collaborator in the government witch hunt, endorsing its goals if not its methods. Today, by agreeing to screen out terrorists, Romero has tacitly acknowledged the legitimacy of the "war on terror," even while vigorously challenging many of its weapons.

Before the McCarthy era's loyalty programs, hearings and Smith Act prosecutions, there were already means of rooting out and prosecuting those who meant to do the nation harm, just as there were before the Patriot Act. The "war on terror," like the McCarthy-era loyalty programs, is motivated not by national security ends but by political ones—ends that by design are anti-democratic. To cooperate, even slightly, as Romero did, is to concede that the government's intentions, if not its methods, are legitimate.

Issues of money and principle will arise again. Given how Romero came out the first time, I think his detractors rightly worry how he will come out the next time. ALAN LEVINE

Cambridge, Mass.

■ While the ACLU board has, as Scott Sherman reports, spoken in favor of Anthony Romero, it continues to fail in its fiduciary duty. Instead of establishing governance mechanisms to assure that transgressions against ACLU policy will not be repeated, the board, as member Vivian Berger tellingly admits, sought to rally around management. Worse, the board undertook to rid itself of internal critics. Thus, ACLU's unhealed wounds can reopen at any moment. Berger's attack on critic and former ACLU board member Wendy Kaminer—referring to her "sort of Madame Defarge quality"—is an example of the circle-the-wagons mentality that prevents the board from exercising independent judgment and authority.

Sherman reports that "Kaminer didn't have enough support to keep her seat" as the Massachusetts affiliate's representative to the national board and that Massachusetts is "solidly behind Romero." Kaminer did not run for re-election because I agreed to run in her stead, as someone who agreed with her criticisms but would approach the issues with less heat. I lost 17 to 15, hardly indicating the affiliate's "solid" support for the ACLU leadership. Further, I disagreed with Kaminer and former executive director Ira Glasser that Romero and ACLU president Nadine Strossen had to go, which is why I did not sign the Save the ACLU website policy statement. But I added a statement of my own decrying the effort, now quite advanced, to cleanse the ACLU leadership of dissidents. This is not how the board of the nation's premier civil liberties organization exercises good governance.

HARVEY A. SILVERGLATE

Los Angeles

■ What angers me about the attacks on Anthony Romero and the ACLU is that those

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EDITORIALS

War Drums on Iran

An eerie sense of déjà vu has accompanied the latest moves by the Bush Administration and its military commanders to explain away the quagmire in Iraq by claiming that Iran is stirring things up. The leaks by anonymous "senior United States military" officials, the grainy photos of supposed serial numbers, the claims that "senior Iranian officials" authorized the smuggling into Iraq of armor-piercing roadside bombs that might have killed US troops—all recall former Secretary of State Colin Powell's truth-stretching presentation to the United Nations before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq.

What is surprising is not that Vice President Cheney and his neoconservative cronies want to expand a war that should never have been waged in the first place. (As Michael T. Klare reminds us on page 4, Iran, a charter member of the "axis of evil," has long been in this Administration's cross-hairs.) It is that they seem to be getting away with it.

Day after day, major media repeat pronouncements from the White House or unsourced leaks from the field with only the barest hint of skepticism. As one example, the *New York Times*'s nearly 2,000-word lead story on February 10 on Iran's alleged support of Shiite militias contained the sole caveat that US officials "acknowledge that the picture is not entirely complete." Skepticism, when it is voiced, comes only later, after the headlines and television news stories have had their impact, and usually only because someone of national standing has spoken up. It is as if journalists had learned nothing over the past six years about the dangers of relying on official sources and of failing to question and challenge a spin-driven Administration.

Fortunately, some members of Congress are quicker studies. "I'm looking at this report with a degree of skepticism," said Democrat Chris Dodd, senior senator and presidential contender, of the Iran "evidence." "I don't doubt that Iran has been involved to some degree, and clearly that's a problem that needs to be addressed, but I'm getting uneasy that [the Administration's] trying to create a premise, set a premise, for some future broader military action in Iran." Progressives like Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee and conservatives like Republican Congressman Walter Jones are sponsoring resolutions that forbid the Administration from attacking Iran without clear authorization from Congress. "Our Constitution states that, while the Commander in Chief has the power to conduct wars, only Congress has the power to authorize war," says Jones. "It's time for Congress to meet its constitutional responsibility."

That will happen only if Congress aggressively investigates claims of Iranian involvement in Iraq. Administration officials and military commanders should be questioned under oath, not allowed to spin anonymously. Assessments from intelligence agencies here and abroad should be examined by the relevant committees. No statement should be accepted as true simply because it came from an official source. Indeed, at this point Congress has ample justification for passing an updated version of the Boland Amendment, which could restrict funding of fights with Iran in the same way another Congress sought to prevent the Reagan Administration's schemes to destabilize Nicaragua.

Those who think it impossible that Americans will wake up one morning to the news that US forces have attacked Iran, ostensibly to protect the troops in Iraq, haven't paid enough attention not just to this Administration but to American history. In the spring of 1970, after weeks of leaks and veiled pronouncements, President Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia—claiming this would reduce US casualties in Vietnam by removing enemy sanctuaries. The bloodshed continued for another five years.

An expanded war in the Middle East could have significantly more serious consequences. The media must be challenged to do their job—as should Congress—by citizens who have decided that they won't be fooled again.

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COMMENT

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Targeting Tehran

At this critical moment when most Americans seek to extricate US forces from the fighting in Iraq as swiftly as possible, George W. Bush appears determined to construct a new rationale for intervention whose logical conclusion is not withdrawal but a wider war, possibly involving attacks on Iran later this year. Like an inveterate gambler who has lost every previous round and now faces insolvency, Bush seems poised to wager everything on one last throw of the dice. Before more lives are put at risk in this reckless bid, the flimsy props of Bush's new rationale must be exposed to rigorous scrutiny and strict limits placed on his warmaking capacity.

The President's new approach was unveiled in his January 10 speech on Iraq. After giving a lifeless, almost robotic rendition of his plan for an increase in US troop strength, Bush suddenly caught fire, turning his attention to the threat purportedly posed by Iran and Syria. Both, he claimed, are allowing insurgents to use their territory as launching pads for attacks on Iraq, but it is Iran that poses the greatest danger, by "providing material support" to Shiite gunmen in Baghdad. At a February 14 press conference he said that "when we find devices in [Iran] that are hurting our troops, we're going to do something about it, pure and simple."

Since then, the Administration has stepped up its campaign against Iran, claiming that Iranian forces are providing equipment and know-how for the manufacture of advanced explosive devices to Shiite militias in Iraq. Though the evidence for such aid remains inconclusive, the White House appears determined to lay the blame for increased American casualties at Tehran's door, thus providing a fresh pretext for escalation.

The Administration has also sought to entwine this new pretext in a larger strategic framework, claiming that the United States faces a coordinated threat from radical Shiite forces throughout the region. Al Qaeda no longer poses the only significant threat to US interests in the Middle East, Bush declared in his State of the Union address. "It has also become clear that we face an escalating danger from Shia extremists who are just as hostile to America." Many of these extremists, he averred, "are known to take direction from the regime in Iran."

And so a new "axis of evil" is being constructed in Washington: In place of the old axis of Saddam Hussein-cum-Al Qaeda, against which we went to war in the first place, we now confront a new alliance between rogue states and terrorist organizations, linking Tehran to Hezbollah and Shiite militias in Baghdad.

And, once again, the possibility that this evil network will acquire and share weapons of mass destruction may be used as the justification for "preventive" strikes against a hostile power. "The gravest danger our nation faces lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology," the Bush Administration avowed in the 2002 edition of its *National Security Strategy* report. Because it is too risky to sit by and allow rogue states like Iran to acquire WMD capabilities so they can pass them on to like-minded terrorists, the Administration insisted, "America will act against such emerging threats *before they are fully formed*." This, in essence, was the rationale given for the invasion of Iraq. Even though it was later

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determined that the Iraqis had not acquired WMDs, there is no reason to assume that Bush has repudiated this precept.

Indeed, Bush has made it very clear in his comments on Iran that while he prefers to resolve the WMD issue through diplomacy, the deadline for a negotiated outcome will happen "sooner rather than later" and that "all options are on the table." Has Bush, in fact, set a specific time limit on his patience? Although it is impossible to know, there are a number of indications that such a limit has been set, possibly for later this year. These include:

§ The deployment of a second aircraft carrier to the Persian Gulf region, along with an accompanying array of cruisers, destroyers and submarines. Several additional US and British naval minesweepers are also being sent to the Gulf—a clear indication that senior commanders anticipate Iranian efforts to block vital oil routes in response to any US airstrikes.

§ The decision to replace the outgoing head of the US Central Command—which oversees US forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and the surrounding region—with a Navy officer, Adm. William Fallon. It makes no sense to put Fallon, a former carrier group commander, in charge unless the next phase of combat in the region will emphasize air and naval operations against Iran.

§ The recent announcement of plans to double the size of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, providing a growing buffer to any Iranian effort to punish the United States by blocking oil exports from the Gulf.

It is possible, of course, that these moves are intended largely as bargaining ploys, to bludgeon the Iranians into abandoning their plans for enriching uranium. But since these moves are coupled with elaborate efforts to establish a rationale for escalation, they should be viewed as signs that Bush has indeed set a deadline—perhaps known only to himself and a few associates—for Iranian compliance. This being so, opponents of the war have a dual responsibility: to contest the *strategic context* for a wider war and to bar *specific acts of escalation* by the President.

As for the strategic context, many of the allegations raised by Bush are dubious at best and easily refuted. There simply is no evidence of a grand Shiite conspiracy against the United States, only of a centuries-long struggle by the oft-maligned Shiite population to be accorded greater respect within the Islamic world. Other issues, however, require closer scrutiny, and the best way to accomplish this is through a series of comprehensive hearings by the relevant committees of Congress, featuring testimony by well-informed witnesses from both within and outside the Administration. The witnesses should be required to address such questions as:

Iran's nuclear capabilities

§ What is the evidence that Iran seeks a nuclear weapons capability, as distinct from nuclear enrichment for civilian purposes?

§ How far in their nuclear endeavors have the Iranians come?

§ What are the options for a diplomatic resolution of the crisis?

Iran's role in Iraq

§ What is the evidence for Iranian military support of militant Shiite factions in Baghdad?

§ Can Tehran play a constructive role in Iraq as part of an overall settlement of outstanding issues (as proposed by the Iraq Study Group)?

The larger strategic equation in the Middle East

§ How does the resurgence of Shiite Islam truly affect US interests?

§ Should the United States help forge an anti-Shiite alliance in the region, or does peace between Israelis and Palestinians take precedence?

These are only some of the questions that must be answered fully and convincingly before Congress, or the American people, assent to any plan to widen the war in the Middle East. And until we receive such answers, Congress should adopt legislation banning the use of federal funds for any attacks on Iran or Syria without its prior authorization. This would separate the question of funding a wider war from the emotional issue of funding for the forces now in Iraq (which a majority of Senate Republicans seem to consider sacrosanct). Surely, if there is one thing most Democrats and Republicans can agree on, it's the need to stop a reckless President from doubling his bet in the war and using the lives of US soldiers as playing chips. MICHAEL T. KLARE

Michael T. Klare, Nation *defense correspondent, is a professor of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College.*

McCain Mutiny

Just as the presidential nomination process begins in earnest, Senator John McCain has suffered a stinging defeat in his home state. For the Republican media darling declared recently by Chris Matthews to be the one candidate who "deserves the presidency," it was an unlikely loss, and so far it has gone unheralded by the national press corps that McCain once half-jokingly called "my base." This defeat was the handiwork of his presumed actual political base—a ragtag band of local conservative activists led by a 65-year-old retired IBM middle manager named Rob Haney.

Who is Rob Haney? He is the Republican state committeeman in Arizona's District 11, McCain's home district. In the past, Haney and his fellow committee members would meet from time to time to review their annual budget, vote on bylaws and pass resolutions. If anyone represents Arizona's Republican Party, advancing the causes of faith, family and freedom, it is the folks from District 11. Yet their importance, let alone their existence, seemed to matter little to their state's famous and ambitious senior senator.

All that changed when Haney organized a revolt that hardly needed encouragement. "People would be calling in to [state committee] headquarters every week, absolutely enraged, threatening to leave the party because of some comments McCain made," Haney told me. "The guy has no core, his only principle is winning the presidency. He likes to call his campaign the 'straight talk express.' Well, down here we call it the 'forked tongue express.'"

Rank-and-file Republicans are disgruntled about McCain's support for campaign finance reform and gun control and his opposition to a federal ban on gay marriage. Conservative anger

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COMMENT

reached a boiling point in 2004 when McCain led the opposition to Prop 200, a state ballot measure restricting public services for undocumented immigrants. In the summer of 2005, months after Prop 200 succeeded with support from nearly 70 percent of GOP voters, Haney introduced a resolution in District 11 to censure McCain for "dereliction of his duties and responsibilities as a representative of the citizens of Arizona." After the resolution coasted through the district, it was introduced before the GOP committee of Maricopa County, Arizona's largest, encompassing Phoenix and Scottsdale (once home to Barry Goldwater).

At the time, McCain and his handlers were working to burnish his conservative credentials to win over wary Republican primary voters. The effort began with McCain's May 2006 graduation speech at Liberty University, a school founded by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, whom McCain had dubbed an "agent of intolerance" during his rancorous 2000 run for the presidency. His makeover continues on February 23, when he is scheduled to speak before the Discovery Institute, the right-wing think tank that has attempted to introduce into public school biology classes the teaching of Intelligent Design.

Although Arizona is somewhat off the national radar, Haney's resolution posed a threat to the McCain makeover. Apparently alarmed, the senator dispatched his chief of staff to the Maricopa County Republicans' meeting to warn against the resolution. At McCain's behest, Arizona's other GOP senator, Jon Kyl, sent his own chief of staff as well. But Haney's resolution passed by a nearly unanimous vote. "No one in the party structure would dare say anything about McCain and the grassroots was enraged, so I voiced their concerns," Haney said. "And McCain and the party establishment came down on me hard. They said, 'You're going to destroy his chances in the presidential campaign.'"

Not content to let the purely symbolic resolution stand, McCain recruited a slate of candidates to oust Haney and his allies in last November's state committee elections. McCain supporters formed a political action committee, Grassroots Arizona PAC, to bankroll this effort. Forty percent of Grassroots Arizona's funds were provided by two Democratic donors from San Francisco apparently enraptured with McCain and his "maverick" image, Gregory and Lisa Wendt, which added fuel to the flames of Haney's revolt. McCain's slate was formidable, including Fife Symington, a former Arizona governor coaxed out of retirement to come to the rescue of his old friend. So worried was McCain about being rebuked by his own party that he threw his own hat into the race, announcing that he would run for state committeeman.

When the votes were counted, McCain and his entire slate were resoundingly defeated. Despite endorsements from virtually every Republican member of Arizona's Congressional delegation, Symington, who had never lost a race in his life, was crushed—as was McCain. Adding insult to injury, in January another key McCain ally, Republican political consultant Lisa James, was defeated for state GOP committee chair by Randy Pullen, a prominent McCain critic and anti-immigrant activist who headed the campaign for Prop 200. James's defeat could complicate McCain's presidential ground game because she was to have used her position at the top of Arizona's Republican apparatus to secure the state's primary for McCain.

McCain is still likely to win his home state's primary. But according to Haney, the senator's failed attempt to oust his critics has galvanized his conservative opponents. "If McCain had just been quiet about me passing those resolutions," Haney said, "the whole issue would have died. I mean, it is unheard of for anyone to care so much about district committeemen."

McCain's botched revenge has solidified his reputation in Arizona's Republican circles as a divisive, untrustworthy and even dangerous figure. Haney hopes the general public meets this side of McCain before his penchant for angry reprisals is invested with the powers of the presidency. "This just shows that McCain is mentally unstable and out of control and vindictive," Haney told me. "If he is determined to go through that much trouble to attack a district committee chairman, what does that say about his ability to handle real political problems?" MAX BLUMENTHAL

Max Blumenthal is a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute.

Pro-Immigrant Populism

Our first priority must be to secure ports and borders to keep out terror threats, illegal drugs and illegal immigrants.... People who want to come to America should follow the rules—and we should enforce them. There should be no cuts in line. Moreover, hiring illegal aliens is no joking matter.... We need to enforce the law on employers who hire illegal immigrants no matter who they are. It's not just a matter of fairness—it's a question of national security.

Who said it: Lou Dobbs? Tom Tancredo? No, Democratic Senator Jon Tester from Montana, one of the "new populists" elected to the Senate in the midterm rout of 2006.

These populists were elected in large part because they responded to the economic anxiety of working- and middle-class people, offering a critique of globalization's impact on the lives and livelihoods of American workers. They tapped into frustration with a "free" trade policy that has benefited multinational corporations while driving down the standard of living for workers here and abroad. But when it came to immigration, the populists opted for fiery protectionist rhetoric instead of appealing both to Americans and immigrants as workers with common interests. They opted for fences instead of proposals that would align immigration policy with the real needs of the economy.

Tester's position, which ranges from irrelevant to inaccurate, is a perfect example. The overwhelming majority of illegal immigrants are from Latin America and are here to work in factories and the construction and service industries. They are not a terror threat. There are significantly fewer visas than there are jobs. Opposing any pathway to legalization would harm American workers because it would inevitably result in several million immigrant workers remaining here in an underground economy that undermines US labor standards and wages. Tester doesn't answer any critical questions about what to do with the 12 million undocumented immigrants here, their role in the economy, the policy that created this situation in the first place or how the immigration

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NEW LEFT REVIEW

In the latest issue: how should the Democrats' recapture of Congress be interpreted?

'The conjuncture of 2006 should be read against the deeper structural movements of the American polity, from the "great society" reforms of the boom era to the rightward shift in political paradigms with the long downturn, from the 1970s. Within this framework the rise of a Republican Right, building from bases in an expanding, non-unionized South, has introduced a new dynamic into US politics: a process that has made possible both the domestic and the foreign policies of the Bush Administration.'
—Robert Brenner, 'Structure vs Conjuncture'

'Although the Democratic victory in 2006 was not quite the deluge that Gingrich and Co unleashed in 1994, it was anything but an average result. The 110th Congress gives the Democrats an extraordinary opportunity to repeal the agendas of the "Republican Revolution" and the "war on terror". But on the mega-issues—Iraq, corruption, unmet social needs, the economy—the hopeful expectations of last November are likely to be betrayed by the higher imperatives of electing Hillary and assuaging big business.'
—Mike Davis, 'The Democrats After November'

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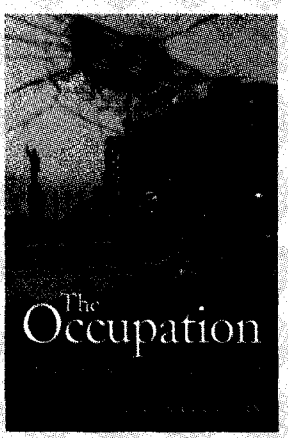

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debate relates to the precarious position of US workers. And that's a shame, because out of this debate can come a coalition of workers—native and immigrant—ready to tackle the fierce stranglehold of the big-business lobby on our government.

Some Democratic strategists have argued that passing immigration reform is important because it will appeal to the growing Latino electorate. That's true as far as it goes, but it ignores the fact that Latinos can be brought into the fold not just as an ethnic group but as a group of workers. They can and should be mobilized not only around legalization and family reunification but around the fallacies of "free" trade and the need to rein in rapacious corporations.

Building support for an immigration reform vision that appeals to US and immigrant workers alike requires both groups to conceive of their interests more broadly. Latinos should be upset when the National Labor Relations Board makes it harder to join a union. US workers should be upset about regressive immigration policy. If we're going to stop the race to the bottom that provides more and cheaper labor to big business, this coalition needs to start acting from a place of shared interest.

How do we get American workers on board? We make the case that they have been harmed by the collusion of government and big business, and that an immigration policy that strengthens the rights of immigrants in the workplace will protect them as well.

The populists got it right that the middle class is increasingly squeezed. The wages of working people have barely budged, while the costs of everything from higher education to healthcare have skyrocketed. The things that used to protect us—strong unions, a progressive government that viewed its responsibility as making things easier for people, not for industry—have disappeared. So it is natural that American workers would be threatened by a large pool of people who accept jobs that pay peanuts. That *is* threatening! But the question is, What do we do with that threat? The truth is that the 12 million unauthorized immigrants here today aren't going anywhere, and we have to make sure they're incorporated into our economy in a way that doesn't undermine US workers.

Any immigration policy has to recognize the critical role immigrants play in our economy. Immigrants—authorized and unauthorized—are consumers, entrepreneurs, workers. They pay more in taxes than they receive in services. They resuscitate struggling neighborhoods. They keep our Social Security system solvent. They provide the services that the middle class relies on from morning until night. But if we want to avoid a race to the bottom between native and immigrant workers, we must create a policy that strengthens the workplace rights of immigrant workers. Simply put, when some workers labor without protected rights, the protected rights of all workers are jeopardized. After all, for most employers faced with a choice between a legal worker with rights and recourse, and one they can exploit with impunity, the choice is all too obvious.

To build this larger coalition, the new populists have to keep in mind that *comprehensive* doesn't equal *progressive*. A bill may be comprehensive but still create a class of exploited workers through its overly complicated legalization process. Proposals that require immigrants to go here, go there and then become eligible for legalization will fail American workers because unauthorized immigrants will remain working in the underground economy, bringing down the wages of native workers. A bill may be comprehensive but still create a guest-worker program that institutionalizes an underclass of workers who lack full rights, who will never fully invest in the US economy, who will always be at the beck and call of employers.

It's also wrong to suggest that we need immigration reform because only immigrants will do the "bad" jobs (or as Karl Rove put it, because "I don't want my 17-year-old son to have to pick tomatoes or make beds in Las Vegas"). We have to work to make those bad jobs good jobs, as we have many times in the history of our country. So we strengthen the rights of people in these industries and we make the jobs better. At that point, it's possible this will lead to an increased demand on the part of native workers for them. If so, so be it. But at least we'll know what our economy really needs and create immigration policy from that perspective, not from the agenda of the US Chamber of Commerce.

The populist bottom line: Who does policy serve? Ultimately, we should deal with immigration policy as we should with globalization, by asking the first question: Whose interests are in the driver's seat? A corporate interest that's driven solely by having a force of workers to exploit? A nativist interest that's worried more about some "culture" of America than whether Americans can put food on the table? Or a pro-worker interest that prizes the dignity of all workers? ANDREA BATISTA SCHLESINGER

Andrea Batista Schlesinger is the executive director of the Drum Major Institute, a progressive policy think tank based in New York City.

CALVIN TRILLIN

REPORT BY THE PENTAGON'S INSPECTOR GENERAL CONCLUDES THAT DOUGLAS FEITH COOKED THE BOOKS ON PRE-WAR INTELLIGENCE

Will Feith get the Medal of Freedom?
Like Franks, Douglas Feith went along.
He did just what Wolfowitz said to.
He was, just like Tenet, dead wrong.

So what's with this snub of our Douglas?
No medal? What's this all about?
He lied even more than the others.
So why has Doug Feith been left out?

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Sold to Mr. Gordon, Another Bridge!

It requires no special skill to sell Michael Gordon, chief military correspondent for the *New York Times*, the Brooklyn Bridge. All you have to do is whisper to him that the transaction will occur at a background "briefing" by anonymous intelligence sources and a "senior official" or two.

One would think that it would require astonishing rhetorical ingenuity on the part of the sales team (in fact operating out of the United States Defense Department) to keep on selling Gordon the Brooklyn Bridge long after the deed from the first sale was pronounced an obvious fraud. But it's not so strange, really. Your true sucker is a vain fellow who can never accept the evidence of his own gullibility and who therefore regards each successive purchase of the Brooklyn Bridge as a sound investment, certain to re-establish him in the public mind as a man with a keen eye for the good deal. He thus becomes psychologically and professionally a captive of the bridge salesmen.

On September 8, 2002, the *New York Times* editors published Gordon and Judith Miller's fictions concerning aluminum tubes in Iraq that were allegedly part of Saddam's nuclear program. Far too late this bout of bridge-buying on the part of the *Times* duo prompted widespread derision. Only then did the embarrassed *Times* editor ban Miller from bridge-buying altogether.

No such restraints were placed on Gordon. After lying low while Miller took the heat, he was back late last year, promoting the famous "surge," sold him by Gen. David Petraeus and others. Then, on Saturday, February 10, the *Times* excitedly announced another major purchase.

The story was from the usual sales folk, unnamed "American officials." Their mission: get Gordon to boost Bush's anti-Iran propaganda drive by promoting the story that Iran is supplying Iraqi Shiites with the new "explosively formed penetrator," the war's "most lethal weapon," now killing American boys in their Humvees, Bradleys and even Abrams tanks. Their method: gull the bridge buyer with a brisk technical résumé.

"To make the weapon," Gordon confided to *Times* readers, "a metal cylinder is filled with powerful explosives. A metal concave disk manufactured on a special press is fixed to the firing end.... According to American intelligence, Iran has excelled in developing this type of bomb and has provided similar technology to Hezbollah. The manufacture of the key metal components required sophisticated machinery, raw material and expertise that American intelligence agencies do not believe can be found in Iraq."

Now, the people attacking and killing most American troops in Iraq are not Shiite but Sunni, and are therefore unlikely to have been supplied by Iran. Some 1,190 US troops have been killed in Iraq since the start of the insurgency by roadside bombs, *a k a* IEDs. But only 170 American soldiers have been killed by EFPs since June 2004, less than 7 percent of the total killed in action.

EFPs are a not-so-recent variant on the 1885 Munroe Effect, the idea behind the shaped charge. (My informant here is Pierre Sprey, a former weapons designer with the A-10 and F-16 planes on his CV.) A conventional shaped charge is a metal funnel inside a cylindrical casing with the open end facing the target and with powder packed behind the narrow end. When the powder is ignited, an explosive shock wave collapses the funnel, creating a gas blowtorch carrying with it a slug of molten metal.

The EFP variation substitutes a copper bowl for the funnel. This sacrifices the efficiency of a focused jet that drills the deepest possible hole in return for a slower, more cohesive slug of molten metal that will hang together even if the charge is detonated 100 feet from the target. Thus, the EFP can be placed at or beyond the shoulder of a road (or on top of a concrete barrier or in the window of a house), aimed at the road's center. When a vehicle or convoy comes along, the bomb can be fired manually by a hidden insurgent or triggered automatically by a garage door opener; in other words, the EFP can be used as a concealed, short-range, armor-piercing gun with little risk to the remote firer.

The front of an Abrams tank is heavily armored, but the back and sides have only one inch of armor, which can be more easily pierced. Indeed, Sprey says a shaped charge of three inches in diameter can go through the back, sides or underneath any tank in the world. The Bradley and Humvee are even more vulnerable.

The DoD started developing small, highly refined EFP bomblets dropped on parachutes and fired by miniature sensors in 1977 as part of the Assault Breaker program. The Air Force's current, in-production EFP cluster bomb is called the CBU-97.

The first terrorist use of an EFP was in the 1989 assassination of German banker Alfred Herrhausen in his armored Mercedes, attributed to the Red Army Faction. This was almost certainly an unsophisticated homemade device.

Even the use of EFPs in Iraq is old news. They were first employed by insurgents in late 2003 and have been used steadily—in small numbers—since then. These improvised EFPs don't require Iranian-manufactured components. The necessary equipment consists of a copper bowl (a hand-beaten one of the style sold to tourists is fine), a six-to-nine-inch-diameter iron or steel pipe (an oil pipe would serve well), a few pounds of explosive and a fuse. The 140 tons of US RDX explosive that went missing after the invasion due to lax security would be high-quality stuff for the job. With these ingredients, all the insurgents need is one or two chalk talks or a video to learn how to assemble an EFP.

Though the *Times* allowed a follow-up news story and an editorial to express caution about Gordon's alarms, his February 10 story had already given the *Times*'s admittedly raddled imprimatur to the government's scaremongering about Iran's role in Iraq.

So there it is. Another bridge in Gordon's real estate portfolio, as the *New York Times* puts its editorial shoulder behind Bush's war, which it has done from the start. Punch Sulzberger told the grandees assembled in Davos in January, "I really don't know whether we'll be printing the *Times* in five years." Hasten the day. ■

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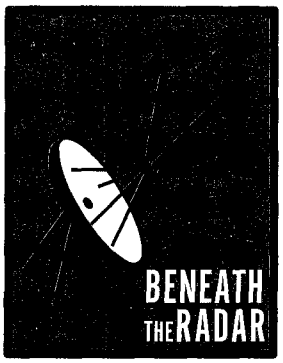
GARY YOUNGE

White History 101



Whatever happened to James Blake? He is probably the most famous bus driver ever. And yet when he died at age 89 in March 2002, the few papers that bothered to note his passing in an obituary ran just a few hundred words of wire copy and moved on.

Given that February is Black History Month, it is worth taking a moment to ask how such a crucial figure could be so cruelly forgotten.

Blake was the Montgomery driver who told a row of black passengers: "Y'all better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats." Rosa Parks was one of those passengers. She made her stand and kept her seat. The rest, as they say, is history.

Well, black history anyway. We know how African-Americans boycotted city transit for thirteen months until the segregationists caved in. We know how the boycott launched the career of a previously unheard-of preacher called Martin Luther King Jr. and made Parks an icon. In schools, bookstores and on TV there is an awful lot of talk about them in February. But nary a word about Mr. Blake. That's because so much of Black History Month takes place in the passive voice. Leaders "get assassinated," patrons "are refused" service, women "are ejected" from public transport. So the objects of racism are many but the subjects few. In removing the instigators, the historians remove the agency and, in the final reckoning, the historical responsibility.

There is no month when we get to talk about Blake; no opportunity to learn the fates of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, who murdered Emmett Till; no time set aside to keep track of Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, whose false accusations of rape against the Scottsboro Boys sent five innocent young black men to jail.

Wouldn't everyone—particularly white people—benefit from becoming better acquainted with these histories? What we need, in short, is a White History Month.

For some this would be one racially themed history month too many. Criticisms of Black History Month from cynics, racists and purists are about as predictable as the arrival of February itself. But for all its obvious shortcomings, Black History Month helps clear a space to relate the truth about the past so we might better understand the present and navigate the future. Setting aside twenty-eight days for African-American history is insufficient, problematic and deserves our support for the same reason that affirmative action is insufficient, problematic and deserves our support. As one means to redress an entrenched imbalance, it gives us the chance to hear narratives that have been forgotten, hidden, distorted or mislaid. Like that of Claudette Colvin, the black Montgomery teenage activist who also refused to give up her seat, nine months before Rosa Parks, but was abandoned by the local civil rights establishment because she became pregnant and came from the wrong side of town.

The very notion of black and white history is both a theoretical nonsense and a practical necessity. There is no scientific or biological basis for race. It is a construct to explain the gruesome reality that racism built. But, logic suggests, you cannot have black history without white history. Of course, the trouble is not that we do not hear enough about white history but that what masquerades as history is more akin to mythology. The contradictions of how a "free world" could be founded on genocide, or how the battle for democracy during the Second World War could coincide with Japanese internment and segregation, for example, are rarely addressed.

"I am born with a past and to try to cut myself off from that past is to deform my present relationships," writes Alasdair MacIntyre in his book *After Virtue*. "The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide."

The purpose here is not to explore individual guilt—there are therapists for that—but collective responsibility. When it comes to excelling at military conflict, everyone lays claim to their national identity; people will say, "*We* won World War II." By contrast, those who say "we" raped black slaves, massacred Indians or excluded Jews from higher education are hard to come by. You cannot, it appears, hold anyone responsible for what their ancestors did that was bad or the privileges they enjoy as a result. Whoever it was, it definitely wasn't "us." This is one more version of white flight—a dash from the inconveniences bequeathed by inequality.

So we do not need more white history, we need it better told. Settlement, slavery and segregation—propelled by economic expansion and justified by white supremacy—inform much of what the United States is today. The wealth they created helped bankroll its superpower status. The poverty they engendered persists. But white history does not mean racist history any more than black history means victim's history. Alongside Blake, Milam and Bryant, any decent White History Month would star insurrectionist John Brown; the Vanilla Ice of the Harlem Renaissance, Carl Van Vechten; civil rights workers Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, murdered near Philadelphia, Mississippi, during the Freedom Summer of 1964; and Viola Liuzzo, murdered during the Selma to Montgomery march. It would explain why Ronald Reagan kicked off his presidential campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, why George W. Bush chose Bob Jones University to revive his presidential hopes. It would tell the story of how Ruby Bates recanted her rape accusation in a bid to save the Scottsboro boys from the noose and how the Blakes never did reconcile themselves to the event that brought them infamy. "None of that mess they said was true," said his wife, Edna. "Everybody loved him. He was a good, true man and a churchgoer."

It would offer white people options and role models and all of us inspiration while relieving the burden on African-Americans to recast the nation's entire racial history in the shortest month of the year. White people, like black people, need access to a history that is accurate, honest and inclusive. Maybe then it would be easier for them, and the rest of us, to make history that is progressive, antiracist and inclusive. ■

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ARTICLES

L'Étranger

by Patricia J. Williams

I mean, you got the first sort of mainstream African-American who's articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy. I mean, that's a storybook, man.

—Senator Joseph Biden, in faint but unfettered praise of Senator Barack Obama

Recently the New-York Historical Society and the Studio Museum of Harlem curated "Legacies," a fascinating show at N-YHS in which contemporary artists reflected on slavery. One of the commissioned pieces that accompanied the display was a short film by artists Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry. It featured McCallum, who is white, and Tarry, who is black, configured as a "twinning doll"—a nineteenth-century toy that has two heads, one at each end of a common torso. At the doll's waist is attached a long skirt or a cloak. Held vertically, the skirt falls and obscures one head. Flipped one way, it becomes a white doll. Turned upside down, the skirt falls the other way and suddenly it's a black doll. In the film, McCallum and Tarry, joined at the waist by some feat of pixilated trickery and dressed in nineteenth-century clothing, flip head over head down a long dark marble corridor, first a white head, then a black head, first a white man, then a black woman, first a Thomas Jefferson, then a Sally Hemings. As they describe it, "the races are joined head to toe...continuously revealing and concealing one another." Such an interesting metaphor for the state of our union.

When I inquired further, McCallum told me that there was an old children's song about the dolls: "Turn you up/Turn you back./First you're white/Then you're black." I tried Googling those words in hopes of finding a recording. Instead I turned up a satirical piece by rocker Lou Reed, "I Wanna Be Black," in which a (presumably hypothetical) "I" desires "to be black"

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THAT'S WHY SO MANY SOMEBODIES READ IT.

Ani DiFranco is a longstanding* Nation *reader.

(Legally speaking, of course, everything has an owner, but as a *Nation* editor once wrote, "it is one of the superb facts about *The Nation* that you can no more 'own' it than you can own the spirit it represents.")

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as an escape from a neurosis of whiteness. Actually, the word "white" is never used in the song. It's alluded to in the chorus—obliquely but with crystal clarity nonetheless: "I don't wanna be a fucked-up middle-class college student any more." According to these lyrics, whiteness is a dull preserve defined by respectable class status, college education and world-class angst; black people have ever so much more fun, what with having "natural rhythm," "a big prick," a "stable of foxy whores" and "get myself shot in the spring" "like Martin Luther King."

The jolly entertainment of switching identity from white to black and back again is not the exclusive province of frat boys slumming around as pretenders to ghetto life. "Jungle parties" are still good clean fun at country clubs, at Halloween parties down at the precinct and in the unfortunate confusion that is Kevin Federline. The inverse—switching from black to white and black again—is more freighted. Blacks who present themselves as clean and articulate and sober and important risk being viewed as false, elitist or duplicitous. "Acting white" has all these connotations. Whites "acting black," on the other hand—i.e., any coded masquerade of down and dirty—tend to be read as cool or maybe disaffected or, at worst, stuck in some stage of rebellious adolescence.

It is Obama's place in the American narrative of chosen migration that makes him so attractive, so intriguing and yet so strange.

Frankly, what I found most unforgivable about Senator Biden's recent remarks was his utter failure to learn from a past in which he was intimately implicated. He was, after all, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee when our spectacularly inarticulate President's father nominated Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. As every last minority graduate of Yale—whew, ten or fifteen at least—came forward to weigh in about whether Thomas or Anita Hill was more believable, media forces expressed shock and awe that there were—gasp—just so many black people who could string a whole sentence together! Astonishing sequences of subject-verb-object! A few years later, it was Colin Powell who was perceived as shockingly articulate; then Condoleezza Rice.

The persistence of this narrative is not limited to Biden. On MSNBC's *Chris Matthews Show*, Matthews hosted a discussion of Obama's decision to run for President. "No history of Jim Crow, no history of anger, no history of slavery," Matthews opined. "All the bad stuff in our history ain't there with this guy." Not true, I thought. The "bad stuff in our history" rests heavily upon each and every one of us. It shapes us all, whether me, Matthews, Obama, Biden—or Amadou Diallo, the decent, hard-working Guinean immigrant without any American racial "history," who died in a hail of bullets fired by New York City police officers because he looked like what the officers, groaning with racial "baggage," imagined to be a criminal. Some parts of our racial experience are nothing more or less than particular to *our* accidental location in the geography of a culture.

If, for example, I migrated to South Africa and were greeted as an exciting, exotic black American prophet (we "articulate" blacks are inescapably "exotic" when we travel abroad), I'd be no less implicated in the complexities of that country's racial struggles—even if I were entirely ignorant of those struggles. At a more complex level, however, American identity is defined by the experience of the willing diaspora, the break by choice that is the heart of the immigrant myth. It is that narrative of chosen migration that has exiled most African-Americans from a substantial part of the American narrative—and it is precisely his place in that narrative that makes Obama so attractive, so intriguing and yet so strange.

Obama's family history is an assemblage of elements of the American dream. His late father migrated from Kenya to the United States; his mother was from Kansas. Before him, the archetypal narrative of immigrant odyssey had been an almost exclusively white and European one. I suspect that Obama's aura stems not just from a Tiger Woods–ishly fashionable taste for "biracialism" but from the fact that he's managed to fuse the immigrant myth of meteoric upward mobility onto the figure of a black man.

Back on *Chris Matthews*, Cynthia Tucker, a black woman who writes for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, responded, "He truly does seem to transcend race because his mother, after all, let's not forget, was white." Matthews agreed: "His grandmother he went to visit in Hawaii is white. Yeah." This, to me, was a baffling exchange. Obama's mother's being white is supposedly what allows him to transcend this thing called race? He looks black but he really isn't? Is blackness really only defined by Jim Crow, anger and slavery? If American-ness, at least in this equation, is defined by patronymic immigrant hope, is racial transcendence then to be defined by maternity, relation to whiteness, biology? "Transcendence" implies rising above something, cutting through, being liberated from. What would it reveal about the hidden valuations of race if one were to invert the equation by positing that Barack Obama "transcended" whiteness because his father was black?

Senator Obama has many attractive attributes—he's smart, a great writer and speaker, a skilled tactician, full of fresh vision, youthful, with a good-looking Kennedy-esque appeal. Yet there are many people to whom his appeal rests not on what he is but on what they imagine he isn't. He's not a whiner; he's not angry. He doesn't hate white people. He doesn't wear his hair like Al Sharpton. He is not the whole list of negatives that people like Chris Matthews or Joe Biden or a whole generation of fucked-up middle-class college students identify as "blackness." Indeed, part of the reason I am anxious about the trustworthiness of Obama's widespread appeal is this unacknowledged value placed on his ability to perform "unexpected" aspects of both whiteness (as in, proud immigrant stock) and blackness (as in, his remarkable ability to discern that the sterling fish knife is not a shoe horn).

This is not just about the dualism of black and white, of

Patricia J. Williams, a Nation *columnist and law professor at Columbia University, is the author, most recently, of* Open House: Of Family, Friends, Food, Piano Lessons, and the Search for a Room of My Own. *She is on the board of ConjunctionArts, a nonprofit run by Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry.*

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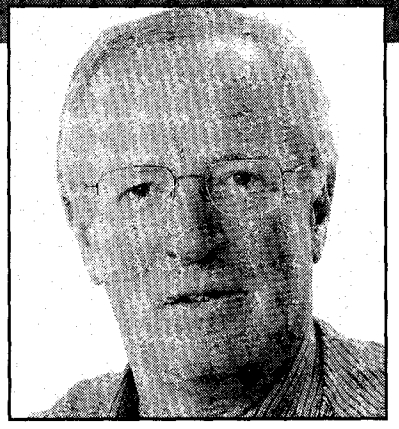

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course. Obama's family raised him in diverse locales—Hawaii, Indonesia, the world. Does the perception of his identity change if we think of him as our first Hawaiian presidential candidate? To paraphrase, is he the first mainstream Hawaiian-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy who wouldn't be caught dead in a grass skirt holding a ukulele? Or the first mainstream Indonesian-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy who had the interesting experience of going to a Roman Catholic school in a largely Muslim country, which might provide lots of useful cultural insights for a President to have in this time and place? No, unfortunately, as there are those at Fox News who can't tell a Roman Catholic school from a madrassa.

Worse yet, a lot of the analysis of Biden's comment has skimmed over his patronizing of Obama's substance. Rather, it has focused on whether the comments destroyed Biden's chances to run for President. Who, after all, even knew Biden had his hat in the ring?

But back to Senator Obama, a presidential candidate of profound decency, extraordinary smarts and great eloquence. He was president of the *Harvard Law Review*, a position that requires not just the highest grades in the entire universe but also the unanimous acclaim of a band of viciously competitive students and a famously divided faculty. Those who make *Law Review* are immediate stars, and fabulously fast-tracked. Those who have served on the *Law Review* include a stunning and stellar array of familiar names: Supreme Court Justices Felix Frankfurter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Antonin Scalia, Stephen Breyer and Chief Justice John Roberts; Dean Acheson, Alger Hiss, Archibald MacLeish, Judge Richard Posner, Michael Chertoff and New York Governor Eliot Spitzer. It is, in the secretly assigned world of global power, an even better ticket to the top than being sealed in a coffin at Skull and Bones. It was acknowledged as such when Jews first joined the *Law Review*, when Democratic political pundit Susan Estrich became the first woman president of the *Law Review* in 1976 and when Obama became its first black president. It is a position whose credentializing power has never been questioned as far as anyone knows—at least till a few weeks ago, when the *New York Times* published an article in which Ron Klain, informal adviser to Biden's presidential bid, wondered if being president of the *Law Review* really and truly required the same skill set as being President of the United States. As a cabdriver recently expressed it to me: "Maybe the mirage in the desert is no more than a benchmark constantly being moved out of reach." (He too was articulate, and quite poetic, that cabbie. Made me wonder what benchmarks had been moved beyond *his* reach to leave him ferrying me around at midnight.)

Of course, the crown of the *Law Review* presidency is not the only aspect of Senator Obama's "authenticity" that's being refigured as a mess of thorns. If no one doubts his blackness when it comes to the uniqueness of his accomplishments while on the *Law Review*, he's apparently not "black enough" in other contexts. In another article in the *Times*, perpetual contrarians like Stanley Crouch, Debra Dickerson and Carol Swain were quoted as questioning whether he truly was a brother beneath the skin. It is surely ironic that Obama—one of the very few

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Americans of any stripe who has actual first-degree relatives in Africa—is being figured in some quarters as an imposter of African-American-ness.

At the same time, Obama's identity reveals the complex blindness and slipperiness of American conceptions of race, culture and ethnicity. There's a lovely quote from Saidiya Hartman's remarkable new book *Lose Your Mother*: As she wends her way through Ghana on a Fulbright Fellowship, she notes, "I was the stranger in the village, a wandering seed bereft of the possibility of taking root. Behind my back people whispered, *dua ho mmire*: a mushroom that grows on the tree has no deep soil. Everyone avoided the word 'slave,' but we all knew who was who. As a 'slave baby,' I represented what most chose to avoid: the catastrophe that was our past...and what was forbidden to discuss: the matter of someone's origins."

As I read Hartman's words, I wondered how familiar that sentiment felt to me, or to the many African-Americans—whether they've never left our shores or traveled the world—so relentlessly in search of "home." I wondered how familiar that passage must feel to recent arrivals to our peculiarly dubbed "homeland." Just today I met a Swedish woman who is phenotypically "Asian." When she was a student at the University of California, she went to the hospital with stomach pains—and was almost committed as insane before she ever got to see a doctor, because the administrative gatekeepers simply could not reconcile her appearance with her assertion that she was a Swedish citizen.

And in this moment of unprecedented diaspora, I wonder how familiar all these sentiments must feel to Barack Obama just now. Flipped endlessly down a hall of mirrored images of blackness and whiteness, he is no less celebrated than Frederick Douglass was as one whose entire identity is mired in the exhausted exceptionalism of the "surprisingly" hyperarticulate African phenotype; yet simultaneously embraced as one who has transcended the embodiment of a troublesome past and emerged on the other side—bright as a newly minted coin, "cleansed" of baggage, of roots, of the unacknowledged rupture that is, paradoxically, our greatest national bond. ■

TO COUNTER RUBINOMICS, PROGRESSIVES NEED THEIR OWN TRADE AND BUDGET POLICIES.

What Kind of Economy?

JAMES K. GALBRAITH

This is the first in a series of essays outlining a new progressive economic policy. The series, we hope, will offer an alternative to the neoliberal thinking that has dominated economic policy within the Democratic Party leadership over the past decade. That thinking is responsible in part, we believe, for an economy of rising inequality that no longer works for ordinary Americans.

—The Editors

TIM ROBINSON

In a debate over the Democratic future, no one should confuse the Hamilton Project with the Republican past. Robert Rubin and his associates have invited a broad dialogue on economic inequality and strategic investment, and on many specific policy questions—including education, health, taxes and wages—they will define the high-profile, wholly respectable neo-Clintonian position in the season ahead. There's nothing wrong with that.

But these advances come at a price, which will be exacted in two areas: the world trading system and domestic fiscal policy. Both of these are far more fundamental to the Hamilton mission than any particular social policy reform. Indeed, one purpose of the Hamilton Project, it seems clear, is to propose just enough creative social advances—such as wage insurance, better teacher pay and healthcare reform—so as to divert discussion from the bedrock commitments to free trade and a balanced budget.

James K. Galbraith is the author of Unbearable Cost: Bush, Greenspan and the Economics of Empire, *just published by Palgrave-MacMillan.*

Progressives shouldn't let this happen. And yet we have our own work to do: Our trade position is obsolete, and there is for now no clear progressive fiscal policy. We need to be talking trade and budgets, not simply because they are too important to bargain away, and not just to contest Rubin's worldview, but to build one of our own that is realistic, compelling and also serves larger purposes, including environmental survival and social justice.

On trade, the Hamiltonians favored the North American Free Trade Agreement, while most populists and progressives opposed it. This fight has been replayed endlessly, and it continues to color the arguments over the Central American Free Trade Agreement and the bilateral free-trade agreements now under negotiation. But as some NAFTA opponents, notably Jeff Faux, have recognized, it's time to get over it. Whether NAFTA created or cost jobs initially, the economies of Mexico and the United States are now about as integrated as they are going to get, and the effect is basically finished. As a result, Mexico's economy grew with ours in the late 1990s and went bust when ours did in 2001. Almost all discussion of outsourcing now focuses on China and India, two countries with whom we do not have, and will not get, free-trade agreements.

More broadly, the late 1990s showed two things about trade agreements. First, they don't prevent full employment in the United States: We went smartly to a full employment economy in 1998 and stayed there for three years. Second, they don't do

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much good either. Compared with the productivity gains engendered by full employment in the boom, those brought on by NAFTA in the mid-1990s were trivial if detectable at all.

So what's the debate these days really about? Why are the Hamilton Projectors so passionate about "free trade"? Perhaps the reason has something to do with the industries they come from. US finance, insurance and the "intellectual property" trades want "free-trade agreements" (and a successful conclusion of the Doha Round of World Trade Organization negotiations) because they want access to other markets and stiff enforcement of trademarks, copyrights and patents. In addition, agribusiness—another sector at the forefront of current trade talks—wants every wheat, corn, rice and cooking-oil consumer it can find.

Trade agreements pushing this agenda don't cost American jobs. The problem is that they are predatory. Thus a main effect of forcing open agricultural markets in Central America will be to displace small corn and bean farmers from the land, increasing migration: As food moves south, people move north. A main effect of the TRIPS regime—the international agreement on intellectual property rights—is that it has obliged poor countries to pay extortionate prices for medicines. A main effect of open financial markets is capital flight and tax avoidance. All of these are well worth opposing, without the crutch of a pretext, and a new agenda might start with this slogan: "Get the fraud out of free trade."

NAFTA is a done deal, and China is a success story we have to live with. Progressives need a narrative that moves past these two issues.

Trade with China is another matter, for here is a fast-growing country that benefits hugely from US trade. China thus poses the question of trade without posing a question of trade agreements. And China has many people very worried.

On China the Hamilton Project—otherwise resolutely against interventions—has harnessed widespread anxieties to its own objectives. The Hamiltonians endorse the idea that China is a challenge. It is a challenge, they say, to be dealt with not via tariffs or quotas but by a massive revaluation of the Chinese currency, the renminbi (RMB), for which liberal senators like Charles Schumer and economists like Tom Palley also forcefully call.

Would a big RMB revaluation solve America's China-trade "problem"? Well, it might hit China's exporters (and also, inevitably, its workers) hard. Multinationals might migrate to other low-wage countries; American importers might seek other sources of supply, in other corners of the Third World. But this much is sure: Not a single low-wage job would return to the United States. So, American consumers could be harmed, while American workers wouldn't be helped. One has to ask: What gives? Why is this an issue for the progressive agenda?

Who really benefits from the pressure that our Treasury Secretary from Goldman Sachs, Henry Paulson, has been putting on Beijing? Well, speculators have flooded Chinese property markets in the past few years, contributing to a massive bubble in Shanghai and elsewhere. (China's trillion-dollar asset reserves come largely from sterilization of those investments—a central bank maneuver to insure that dollars do not circulate in China—and not just from its trade surplus.) If Paulson succeeds, they clearly would make out nicely. It may be that some of those speculators live in New York. That may explain Paulson's call—and Schumer's support—for an RMB revaluation. But it's not a reason for the rest of us to jump on board.

The facts are clear: NAFTA is a done deal, and China is a success story we have to live with. Progressives need a trade narrative that moves past these two issues. Broadly, this means accepting manufactured imports and dropping the idea that we can control—or that it matters much—who assembles television sets or stitches shirts. Standards to guard against flagrant abuses such as child and prison labor are fine, but it's an illusion to think they will, or should, dent the flow of goods from China. A progressive trade agenda should focus, instead, on building stronger world markets for our exports, and in ways that do not trample on the needs and rights of poor people in poor countries. That should provide plenty of room for future fights with free-trade absolutists.

At home, we have better things to do. We should specifically focus on creating new jobs, in sectors (including high tech, education, healthcare and energy conservation) that meet national needs and build world markets for our goods. We should rebuild our cities and transport systems, protect our vulnerable Gulf Coast and otherwise get on with meeting the challenge of climate change. And that raises the second big problem of the Hamilton agenda, which is its insistence on balancing the budget.

Today, many Democrats are converts to balanced budgets and pay-as-you-go budget procedures, and many accept that when Democrats return to power, deficits must be cut before anything else is done. But the world has changed, and while this formula appeared to work for Bill Clinton, it probably won't work for Hillary if she gets that far. Clinton was able to preside over a largely private-sector boom—the information-technology bubble—that can't be repeated, in a time when we weren't yet aware of the wolves at our door. But, just as Alexander Hamilton proposed to build America with public works, today we require major public investment for the vast challenges we face. Of these, as Al Gore warns, the largest is to transform our patterns of energy use and defend against climate change.

If we fail here, then in a century or so some of our coastal cities and many others elsewhere will flood—as New Orleans did—suffering irreparable damage. Around the world, food supplies will fail and populations will move—massively, uncontrollably, miserably. If future generations mean anything, the benefits from preventing this are clear. The necessary scale is huge. The work must start soon. It makes sense to borrow to do this job, especially given the prevailing low long-term interest rates. If we insist on paying from current revenue, it won't happen. And that is what is at stake, just to begin with, in the argument over balancing the budget. There are other impor-

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tant issues, but this one is quite sufficient to make the point.

Thus, even if running budget deficits has important economic costs, we ought to pay them in order to meet our most pressing objectives, on climate change and other priorities. But in fact running moderate fiscal deficits has no discernible costs. In particular, the claim that current deficits are raising interest rates can't be backed up even by the best efforts of those who believe it. In a paper last year, I examined the detailed work on this topic of two leading Hamiltonian economists, Bill Gale and Peter Orszag, and showed that their own econometrics found no such effect. When I pointed this out, Gale and Orszag reacted with silence.

Deficit-fetishism also bolsters the perennial campaign to cut the Social Security system, now taken up by the alarmist David Walker, head of the Government Accountability Office, and by Ben Bernanke, chair of the Federal Reserve System. Here the Hamilton Project strategy document is extremely reticent—it barely mentions Social Security by name. But it is riddled with code words about the long-term "entitlement problem," which, it avers, can be solved only by a "bipartisan commission" acting on well-known options, behind closed doors. This is not reassuring.

If we deliver on the real needs of the country, fiscal transgressions will be forgiven; if we fail, fiscal probity will neither excuse nor save us.

In fact, Social Security is in better financial shape than ever, holding vast stocks of Treasury bonds on which interest can and will be paid. No economic or budget imperative requires that Social Security be cut, now or later. In private discussion Hamilton leaders let on that they understand this. But they are prepared, nevertheless, to include Social Security cuts—pension cuts for America's elderly, many of whom would otherwise be poor—in some sort of grand deficit bargain. Progressives must be absolutely categorical in rejecting any such deal.

Healthcare costs are a big problem. But they are a problem affecting both public and private healthcare, not Medicare and Medicaid alone. And it's highly unlikely that the problem of rising healthcare costs will extend to the point projected by Bernanke and Walker, who imply that healthcare will absorb one-third of the GDP within a generation—two or three times as much as in any other country. If that happens, as Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, has pointed out, we could cost-effectively contract out medical care to the Canadians and the French.

Is there anything really wrong with fiscal policy right now? Present deficits are small, and it's obvious from low long-term interest rates that financial markets do not take the exploding-deficit stories seriously. The greater risk is that a continued fall in home-building and prices could bring on recession, requiring a more active fiscal policy and bigger deficits than we have now. Sure, Congress should let the Bush tax cuts mostly expire, and if one wants to raise future tax rates just to make the long-term projections look better—well, fine. But that's a cosmetic gesture, with no current impact, and easily changed if need be by any later Congress. Our main task is to deliver on the real needs of the country. If we do that, fiscal transgressions will be forgiven. If we fail, fiscal probity will neither excuse nor save us.

Finally, progressives should turn their energies to a challenge that the Hamiltonians never discuss and seem determined to ignore, and that is to devise effective new rules for the global financial system. For the world is changing in ways that will not permit a return to the go-go Wild West of international finance of the 1990s, even if Robert Rubin and his colleagues do return to power in 2009.

The 1997 Asian crisis and the 1998 Russian crisis marked—it is now clear—the last days of an illusion: that unfettered global credit markets can govern themselves. Russia has since retreated into itself, Asia is developing a sophisticated substitute for the Asian Monetary Fund we denied them a decade ago and most of Latin America has rejected neoliberal globalization at the polls, while new structures of mutual assistance for development are gradually being built. The chaos of a financial system run by bankers alone is therefore gradually yielding to new systems of control.

We should welcome this development. We should oppose efforts to introduce new instabilities—which is basically the issue today between Wall Street and China. The challenge before us is not to restore the global dominance of American banks. We should not play junior partners in that game but instead should help plan for a smooth transition to something better—protecting as far as possible not symbols of power but the broad benefits of our standard of life.

As part of this, a progressive economics needs to break with the polite traditions of our subject in one other way. We cannot avert our eyes, as many economists habitually do, from the disaster of Bush's foreign policy. The calamity in Iraq is plainly causing the world to rethink how much it can rely on American leadership, and this has consequences already visible in the decline of the dollar. If there is a war with Iran, the rethinking will accelerate, and what we've seen so far could be only a harbinger of greater difficulties still to come.

Although a collapse of the dollar reserve system probably isn't imminent, this issue will not disappear, even if Bush's policies are decisively rejected in 2008. Left unattended, it could lead to a repeat of the 1970s, when progressive hopes were knee-capped by international financial instability, a declining dollar and externally inspired inflation.

This problem defies easy solutions, but we who are progressives, who are populists, who are concerned about the economic security of working Americans, of the country as a whole and of the world system, should be thinking about them. We should be working, with international partners, on blueprints for a new system combining mutual and collective security with economic stabilization. For only this can foster sustainable development worldwide, while at the same time permitting us to attend to social justice and the environment at home.

This is not a job that private banks want to turn over to us. It is therefore not going to be found on the agenda of the Hamilton Project. That is a powerful reason that it should be on ours. ■

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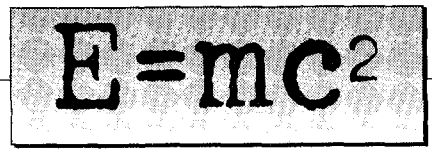

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Dr. Richard Wolfson (Ph.D., Dartmouth College) is Professor of Physics at Middlebury College in New England. Decades of teaching at Middlebury, with its strong emphasis on the humanities, have made him an expert at demonstrating the logic and significance of physics to students from many fields. His writings have appeared in *Scientific American*. He is author of *Physics for Scientists and Engineers*.

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AMID CONTROVERSY, THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM MARCHES NOISILY INTO NAIROBI.

Out of Africa

ALISA SOLOMON

TIM ROBINSON

The official theme for this year's World Social Forum, held in Nairobi, Kenya, from January 20 to 25, was "People's Struggles, People's Alternatives: Another World Is Possible." But a sign carried by a Kenyan HIV/AIDS peer counselor at the opening rally in Uhuru Park on a hot and dusty Saturday afternoon offered a terser slogan that could have served as well for this edition of the annual alter-globalization confab: "You get rich, we die." Though directed specifically to pharmaceutical companies that price antiretroviral drugs far beyond the means of most of the world's 39.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS, Albert Musuagilu's placard spoke just as pointedly for causes pressed by some of the most visible participants in this year's WSF: debt cancellation, food security, land rights and public, potable water.

Like any aspect of the sprawling, chaotic people's alternative to the World Economic Forum in Davos, this WSF—the seventh—has a meaning as particular as any of the myriad paths one might have traced through the six days of some 1,200 panels, workshops, rallies, marches, debates, performances, lectures, spontaneous kaffeeklatsches and late-night parties. Its significance can be found in the big initiatives that groups from all over the world agree to take on together—a new pan-African network against water privatization, for example, or the unveiling of a Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists. Or it can lie, less visibly but no less powerfully, in serendipitous personal encounters—a member of the US Hip Hop Theater Festival falling into the opening day march next to the young director of a theater project in Nairobi's infamous Kibera slum and forging an ongoing alliance with him; a Somali woman who always yearned to set up women's radio programming in her homeland by chance sitting down for an espresso next to Air America journalist Laura Flanders, who hooked her up with the Prometheus Radio Project, which teaches people all over the world to build low-power radio stations. Bringing together people who act locally for the purpose of strategizing globally, this WSF electrified legions of its 60,000 participants (more than 80 percent of them African). At the same time, some WSF veterans, craving a unified agenda and frustrated by logistical snags and ideological inconsistencies, questioned whether this formless, headless experiment in self-organized anti-globalization activities had run its course.

Located in Africa for the first time, this WSF stayed close to the ground in many of its program offerings. There's nothing abstract about the effects of neoliberal economics in a country once rich in natural resources but ranked 152 out of 177 on the UN's Human Development Index (and of the twenty-five that fare worse, all but one—Haiti—is in Africa).

Farmers, forest dwellers and hunter-gatherers from rural areas of Kenya, for instance, came to the forum with sagas of livelihoods ruined by multinational companies in the name of development. Residents of lush farmland an hour's drive from downtown Nairobi described how the flower industry—Kenya's second-largest export business—is draining Lake Naivasha to irrigate plants, thoroughly upsetting the ecological balance and thus a generations-old fishing trade that long sustained the community. Martin Simotwo, a soft-spoken 36-year-old Ogiek from the Mount Elgon area, took a seven-hour bus trip to bring the forum news of his people's efforts to preserve the forests on which their way of life depends—even as logging and cotton industrialists bulldoze trees away, with the assistance of armed gangs and the blessings of the Kenyan government.

"Corporate wrongs are being played out starkly here in Africa," said the South African poet Dennis Brutus. "And they are being challenged strongly here. The WSF helps us articulate that challenge."

It's not that Kenyans, and Africans more generally, hadn't already expressed their opposition to resource plundering, forced displacements and policies that favor profits over people—Simotwo's local group, for example, is a member of the Kenya Land Alliance, an umbrella of more than eighty-five organizations founded in 1999 to press for progressive land reform. Indeed, as the KLA's materials narrate, land grabs enriching the prosperous and politically well connected date back to the colonial period, when the best agricultural territory was reserved for white settlers; since independence, corrupt leaders have often doled out land as patronage payoffs. The effects of corporate globalization—often so shocking to those Western activists newly encountering such issues as water privatization, seed patenting, resource and capital extraction, the starvation of farming communities made hungry by a forced shift to single-crop, export-only agriculture—are a sadly familiar story in Africa: same old plot, even some of the same old characters, if now with the ever more powerful weapons of free-trade agreements and World Bank pressures. To confront these forces in Nairobi—amid its energetic downtown urbanity, enormous NGO stratum, festering slums, gaping income disparities and world-record robbery rate—was to stand on the pulse of the racing heart of neoliberalism.

Numerous speakers remarked on the power of holding the WSF in the place where humankind was born. The African continent is also the source of the global North's abiding prosperity—accrued on the basis of Africa's natural resources and on the laboring backs of its captured people. "Who owes whom?" asked a poster announcing a session featuring econo-

Alisa Solomon, a New York journalist and theater critic, is on the faculty at the Columbia School of Journalism.

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mists and activists from Malawi, the Philippines, Ecuador, Brazil and India on ecological debt—the idea that industrialized Northern countries ought to compensate those in the Southern Hemisphere for ravaging their environments as the North has mined, clear-cut, dammed and drilled its way to wealth. And now, with the advent of the Pentagon's "Africa Command," the continent is the newest front in the "war on terror."

Simotwo and other African pastoralists joined a two-day conference inside the WSF on "food security and agricultural reform" organized by La Via Campesina, an international movement of peasant organizations and agricultural workers, which launched an African campaign at the forum. More than 250 people packed into one of the scores of makeshift meeting rooms marked off by tarpaulin walls in the bleachers of the Moi International Sports Centre, where the forum spread itself out through the gated grounds. Maize growers, goat herders, beekeepers, cotton pickers and flower workers from far-flung places crowded under banners promising "another countryside is possible." This—as in dozens of meetings scattered throughout the forum on such topics as "Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Non-conflict Zone Countries," "Right to Health," "Art and Activism," "China in Africa," "WikiLeaks.org: Open Government Through Mass Document Leaking"—was articulating a challenge in another sense of the word: It was creating the joints to connect autonomous local efforts to one another, enabling them to move in a coordinated way.

The WSF in Kenya was the coming-out party for the collective force of African social movements.

Every issue under discussion took its moment in the blazing sun, with banners, songs and often dances declaring the presence of different movements: the stomping sandals of "women moving together" for "women's empowerment in Zambia" over here; the steady drum of Dalit marchers there; Ethiopians promenading in intricate, unison steps against militarization; Ugandans with disabilities chanting about human difference.

Critics of the WSF—outsiders writing in the local press and participants blogging from inside—made fun of these manifestations, sniping that it's pointless to picket an audience of comrades in a closed space. But they missed the point: More an act of self-interpellation than protest, the processions were the means by which disparate concerns announced themselves as part of a world movement. "We are organizations from all over Kenya and Africa meeting each other for the first time," said Lilian Njehu, of the Kenyan women's group Daughters of Mumbi. "And we are strengthened because the rest of the world is coming here to say no to the same things we are saying no to."

The WSF, in other words, was the coming-out party for the collective force of African social movements—and quite literally for the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya. GALCK hosted a tent called the Q-Spot, where hundreds of LGBTI people gathered daily for incisive panels—such as a high-powered discussion of antihomosexual laws around Africa and strategies for defeating them—and for informal group talks, involving straights and gays alike, leaning into discussion circles to hear about safe, hot sex.

The Q-Spot buzzed with the same sort of revolutionary energy as the Via Campesina meeting: cohorts finding each other and making fast friends and common cause—whether over corn cultivation or condom distribution. But the queer activists faced an instantaneous backlash, with rebukes in the Kenyan press, and even opposition among their ostensible allies. At the WSF's closing rally, a Ugandan lesbian took the stage to denounce criminalization of homosexuality, debunk the notion that it is "un-African" and assert some queer pride; people in the crowd shouted obscenities at her.

Pointed protests did explode within the Sports Centre, directed at local WSF organizers and bringing to light both local corruption and the inescapable contradictions of trying to create any kind of alternative island in a sea of global capitalism. Hundreds of Kenyans from Nairobi slums objecting to the $7 registration price (for people from the North it was $110), in a country where most people earn less than $2 a day, crashed the gates on the first two days of the forum, winning a reduction to about 75 cents, and then a total scrapping of the fee. Later they stormed a food concession inside the stadium, which had been given a central locale for peddling its $8 plates of chicken while small, independent food stalls were relegated to the fields on the other side of the complex's fence. Worse, the five-star enterprise was owned by Kenya's Minister of Internal Security. Seeking to shut the restaurant down while highlighting the plight of Nairobi's poor, protesters seized the day's spaghetti and stew and shared it among the crowd.

The leader of the protests, a fiery young woman named Wangui Mbatia, set up in a downtown Nairobi park a parallel forum for those initially priced out of the Moi Stadium: the People's Parliament. There, for two days, Kenyans—mostly men, mostly speaking in Kiswahili—debated government corruption, the housing crisis and global capital. "Don't burn down my house and then offer me a blanket!" cried one participant, summing up the way rich countries deplete and impoverish Africa and then bring in relief industries.

For Cândido Grzybowski, a Brazilian sociologist and a co-founder of the WSF, who continues to serve on its International Coordinating Committee, the demands on the WSF by poor people represented not so much a critique of the forum as an advance. In Porto Alegre, Brazil, where the WSF was born (and supported by a local left-wing government), he said, "people from the favelas were not there. This is not a new issue. Our trouble in the forum is elitism." He cited research by the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analysis (which he directs) showing that some 10 percent of participants in Porto Alegre, and 42 percent at the 2004 WSF in Mumbai, held a master's degree or doctorate—and the incomes that go with them. That less privileged people were banging on the gates in Nairobi was, by his reckoning, a leap forward.

Unlike in Latin America, social movements in Africa often find support—or even impetus—from NGOs and churches, which thus had a far larger, and contentious, presence in Nairobi

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than at any WSF so far. NGOs set up the biggest, most well-appointed tents at the sports complex and bused in many of the grassroots African participants. Some evangelical groups, on hand to take part in discussions about ecological and human rights causes, openly proselytized.

These awkward juxtapositions provided grist for those WSF veterans arguing for a more centralizing and coordinating role for the WSF as it approaches its eighth year. The genius of the forum—its very purpose—has been its horizontal organization: Whoever subscribes to its charter of principles—opposition to "neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism," acceptance of the forum as "a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context" and so on—is welcome to host a session. No planners, no shapers, no inviters (just some managers who group the offerings under thematic rubrics and assign them slots in the schedule). The forum as such does not issue statements or initiate actions—though in the Assembly of Social Movements, which follows its last sessions, groups assert their plans and ask for solidarity. (The February 2003 worldwide mobilization against the war in Iraq grew out of such a meeting.)

Much of the forum's meaning lies in this new culture of organizing—frustrating as it can be in action. Corporate consultants who are paid fortunes to help companies be more efficient would take one look at the WSF and lash it with their current buzzword, "silos": the tendency of different segments of an entity to carry on separate discussions without integrating their efforts or sharing their breakthroughs. A "peace assembly" at the WSF, for example, flung around trusty, fusty rhetoric about US imperialism and the "logic of the expansion of the capitalist system," which feeds the "war on terror"; but there were no Africans in the room, and there was no reaction to the US bombing of Somalia that had just taken place—and that Somalis at the forum had protested the day before. Wars in Congo and other parts of Africa—discussed in small sessions—didn't even blip onto the radar screen of the "peace assembly."

The forum need not try to become a Fifth International in order to assert a priority or two and try to synthesize a few ideas, suggested Trevor Ngwane, an antiprivatization activist from Johannesburg. What if, he wondered, the WSF named, say, debt cancellation as one year's theme, gave it some plenary space in the program and called for a day of international action?

It's the participants themselves, Grzybowski counters, who can make that happen—and in some ways, they are now being challenged to do so. Next year the WSF will take a breather as many participants are finding the annual drain on resources and energy for their home-based activism too much to bear; it will resume in 2009, at a place yet to be chosen. Meanwhile, for next January—coinciding, as the WSF always does, with the World Economic Forum—the WSF calls for a day of international action, which, true to form, will take shape through the thrilling, thorny process of global coordination and local initiative. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

pages in *The Nation* or those stories in the *New York Times* could have been devoted to alerting the public to how the Bush Administration is violating civil liberties at home and human rights abroad. Those precious column inches could have reported on all the things the ACLU is doing in the courts, through public education and in grassroots organizing to protect the Constitution. And think of the thousands of hours spent by national and local ACLU board members dealing with the critics that could have been spent defending civil liberties.

Has Anthony Romero made mistakes? Of course he has. Should his actions be reviewed by those to whom he reports? Sure they should. Has he learned to consult sooner and more broadly with ACLU leadership when dealing with tough decisions? I bet he has. Has he been an effective, visionary and dynamic executive director at one of the most critical times in ACLU history? You bet he has.

When President Lincoln's advisers complained about General Grant's drinking, Lincoln reportedly replied, "Find out what he's drinking and send a case of it to all my generals." Despite Romero's past mistakes (and drinking isn't one of them), he's doing a superb job and deserves the support of everyone who cares about the future of our constitutional democracy. STEPHEN F. ROHDE

SHERMAN REPLIES

Brooklyn, NY

■ Re Harvey Silverglate's letter: Days before my piece went to press, I asked Wendy Kaminer, "My understanding is that you didn't have enough support to keep your seat on the Massachusetts affiliate board. Is that true?" Kaminer replied: "I can't deny that."

SCOTT SHERMAN

'SURGE' SAVES SUNNIS, SHIITES

Port Orange, Fla.

■ Re Gary Younge's "The Illogic of Empire" ["Beneath the Radar," Feb. 5]: It seems to me that the "surge" in Iraq to prevent Sunnis and Shiites from killing each other is more akin to Britain's use of its army in Northern Ireland for coming between Catholics and Protestants than to Churchill's attempt to hang on to the subcontinent. If one takes an antireligious position (a plague on all their houses), it is not important if Muslims kill each other (Iraq), if Christians kill each other (Northern Ireland), if Jews and Muslims kill each other (Israel/Palestine/Lebanon) or if Christians and Muslims kill each other (the former Yugoslavia).

But if one comes from the morality-based secular humanist position, as I presume a lot of *Nation* readers do, an effort to stop the 100-a-day Sunni/Shiite deaths can only be commended, particularly when one looks at our responsibility for same. It is a form of penance. I believe this position is consistent with being an opponent of the Iraq War from the beginning, as I have been. RALPH D. SMITH

AROMA-RAMA

Redding, Conn.

■ Lakshmi Chaudhry's January 29 "Mirror, Mirror On the Web" laments the low standard that has become, well, standard in this great nation. No argument there. But she is mistaken in suggesting that the desire to be noticed is new, much less confined to our species. Wolves, social creatures who live in packs, roll in things like dead squirrels in order to obtain a bad smell. It is not to mask their own smell (after all, a wolf that rolls in dead squirrel remains smells like a wolf that has rolled in dead squirrel remains). It is to be noticed. It is a strategy for getting attention. Simply put, it is their way of saying, "Hey, look at me! I stink!" For those of us without access to dead squirrels, there's YouTube. ERIC RUBURY

ANN & MOLLY, W. & DICK

Lakeview, Ore.

■ We've lost Ann Richards and Molly Ivins, Texas's sharpest wits. We're stuck with Bush/Cheney, Texas's dullest twits.

DOUG TROUTMAN

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Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri chatting with Hezbollah lead[illegible]ssan Nasrallah, May 2001 REUTERS PHOTO ARCHIVE/NEWSCOM

Sect Symbols

ANNIA CIEZADLO

KILLING MR LEBANON: The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and Its Impact on the Middle East.
By Nicholas Blanford.
I.B. Tauris. 236 pp. $27.95.

RAFIQ HARIRI AND THE FATE OF LEBANON.
By Marwan Iskandar. Saqi. 239 pp. $24.95.

HEART OF BEIRUT: Reclaiming the Bourj.
By Samir Khalaf. Saqi. 276 pp. $19.95.

ALL HONOURABLE MEN: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon.
By Michael Johnson.
I.B. Tauris. 298 pp. $74.95.

For most Westerners, the words "downtown Beirut" conjure up two distinct images: a farrago of bullet-scarred buildings, car bombs and machine-gun-toting militiamen, and a glitzy, picturesque pedestrian mall. Nobody remembers Wadi Abu Jamil, the old Jewish quarter of downtown Beirut, a warren of winding alleys, antique Ottoman and French Mandate houses, and a lonely crumbling synagogue. By the mid-1990s, it was home to everything the Lebanese government would rather forget. Most of those who lived there were Shiites from the south of Lebanon, routed from their homes by the Israeli occupation and shunted into the neglected neighborhood by a city that didn't want them.

But somebody wanted Wadi Abu Jamil. Solidere, the private company that had the contract to rebuild the city center, was determined to raze the old downtown by any means necessary. So when the Ayad family refused to leave their home in February 1996, Solidere dispatched a crew of Syrian and Egyptian guest workers to begin tearing down the four-story building—with the family still inside. As the laborers began to dismantle the building, not surprisingly it collapsed. Seven workmen and six of the Ayads, including a 2-year-old boy and a 3-month-old baby, were crushed to death by the march of reconstruction.

Rafik Hariri, the billionaire prime minister who founded Solidere, expressed his "sorrow" while attending a banquet at a five-star Beirut hotel. "This incident has shaken the hearts of all of us," he assured the grandees at the banquet, promising to conduct an investigation, punish those responsible and guarantee the "rights of the innocent." Predictably, Hariri's foes,

Annia Ciezadlo is a journalist based in Beirut.

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the Shiite political parties Amal and Hezbollah, made a great show of wanting justice for the Ayads—mainly to squeeze more money from Hariri. But in Lebanon, the innocent have few rights; and so Solidere continued its mass clearance, bulldozing neighborhoods and critics alike until barely a memory of either was left.

You won't find a whisper of this tragedy in the paeans to Beirut's resurrection that parade with fulsome predictability through Western newspapers. Nor will you read about it in the bushel of biographies published in the two years since Hariri's assassination, or the buckets of glowing travel-brochure prose about Lebanon's post–civil war revival. In these accounts, a simplistic narrative dominates: a wounded city healed, rebuilt by a savvy, big-hearted tycoon who transformed a war-ravaged capital into a gleaming tourist hub before his dramatic assassination on February 14, 2005; followed by the peaceful "cedar revolution," which ousted Syrian troops from Lebanese soil. The phoenix works overtime in this version of events; and if you had a dollar for every time the old "Paris of the Middle East" shibboleth rears its head, you'd feel almost as rich as Hariri himself.

The problem with this confectionary tale is that it does almost nothing to explain why downtown Beirut is today the center of a battle for the future of Lebanon, a brewing proxy war for the soul of the Middle East—and for America's tarnished image abroad. To understand why the playground of downtown Beirut has become a battleground once again, you have to look past the glittering surfaces of its luxury stores, past the pretty flags and banners of the so-called cedar revolution. The secret history of downtown Beirut and the man who rebuilt it is more complicated than the fairy tale; because it doesn't go down as smoothly, and is not as easy to report, it remains largely untold. Which is a shame, because compared with the fable, it's every bit as much of a thriller.

After the explosion that shook Beirut on February 14, 2005, crowds of soldiers, policemen and bodyguards gathered around the huge crater punched in the road by approximately one ton of TNT, dragging charred bodies from flaming cars. "This is the car of the big man! The big man!" one of the rescuers shouted over and over again, with hoarse anguish, pointing to Hariri's blackened Mercedes. The news anchor at Future TV, the television branch of Hariri's media empire, wept as she read the news: The big man was dead.

The ex–prime minister was burned to an unrecognizable cinder, but in *Killing Mr Lebanon*, Beirut-based journalist Nicholas Blanford tells us how one of his bodyguards, Abed Arab, identified the big man's body by looking at the hand that Hariri had once magnanimously allowed him to kiss: "It's the fingernails that give it away. An image of Hariri…flashes into his mind. It was November 1, the boss's birthday. Abu Tarek [Hariri's chief bodyguard] asked [Arab] if he would kiss Hariri's hand as a gesture of respect. Hariri didn't like offering his hand to anyone, but Arab was different. He was family. Hariri had sat on the sofa and raised his hand. Arab took it and kissed it. It was an intensely personal moment. And now here he was sitting in the back of an ambulance before this ruined corpse whose clean, neatly clipped fingernails were the same as those he had kissed three months earlier."

Lebanon's government is still heavily stacked with hereditary clan chieftains known as zaims—patriarchal political bosses.

If this sounds embarrassingly feudal—the faithful retainer agog with gratitude at being permitted to kiss his lordship's hand—it's a sadly accurate depiction of Lebanese politics. Lebanon's government is still heavily stacked with hereditary clan chieftains known as *zaims*, defined by Michael Johnson in his excellent sociological study of the Lebanese civil war, *All Honourable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon*, as "powerful parliamentarians who operated as patriarchal political bosses." A *zaim* is a feudal warlord, a political patron and a party machine boss all rolled into one: a big man. The *zaims* have dominated Lebanese politics, by virtue of their last names (Gemayel, Jumblatt, Franjieh, Arslan) and little else, for centuries.

The irony is that "Mr. Lebanon," the big man who came to define his country to those outside it, wasn't one of them. Hariri was the son of a Sunni fruit picker from the southern port city of Sidon, a nobody from a family of unknowns. Leaders love to boast about their humble origins, but in Lebanon's tribal kakistocracy, for a peasant to ascend as far as a Parliament seat is still rare. For such a man to become a successful prime minister was almost unthinkable.

Hariri followed the path to success trod by so many young Lebanese: exile. In Saudi Arabia, his talent for getting construction projects done in record time made him a favorite of the royal family. As the desert kingdom's envoy to Lebanon, Hariri funneled cash and diplomacy to various parties during the fifteen-year civil war, all the while waiting patiently for his prize: Lebanon's reconstruction contract.

In 1989, toward the end of the civil war, Hariri helped broker a summit in the Saudi resort town of Taif, where he had built a luxury hotel for his royal patrons. In the resulting Taif Accord (which some even claim Hariri wrote himself), the various warlords who had spent the past fourteen years butchering other Lebanese granted each other immunity, an act of collective amnesia that set the tone for the country's postwar orgy of forgetting. Accountability, truth and reconciliation, restitution or even acknowledgment of crimes committed—none of these were invited to Taif. Syrian dictator Hafez al-Assad, an American ally at the time, had killed thousands of his own people and countless Lebanese (including at least some of the 17,000 Lebanese who disappeared during the civil war, their bodies never found). But with Saudi and American blessings, the Taif Accord installed the Syrian regime as the occupying power charged with Lebanon's postwar "security."

For a country sick to death of warlords, Hariri seemed like a godsend. Here, at last, was a man with no blood on his hands; where others sprayed bullets, he spread the soothing salve of Saudi cash. Unlike the landed *zaims*, who mainly helped their co-religionists, Hariri made charitable donations that crossed sectarian lines. His Hariri Foundation, established in 1979, gave out tuition loans for young Lebanese students. Over the next twenty years, he subsidized the education of 35,000 young students regardless of sect—in a tiny country like Lebanon, a significant chunk of a generation's youth.

And so by the time he became prime minister, in 1992, Hariri was immensely popular. When he proposed a dramatic renovation of Beirut's old downtown, using a private company with sweeping powers to expropriate land from its owners, he had the backing of most of the country's financial and intellectual elite. In 1995 writer Philip Khoury gushed that "investment in Solidere more closely represents a wager on a country than an investment in a company." To be against Hariri, then, was to be against Lebanon itself. The young man from the hinterlands had become the country's biggest *zaim*.

Instead of letting the rebuilding founder amid the factional infighting and corruption that curse the Lebanese state to this day, Hariri proposed an alternative: A private company, not subject to civil-service

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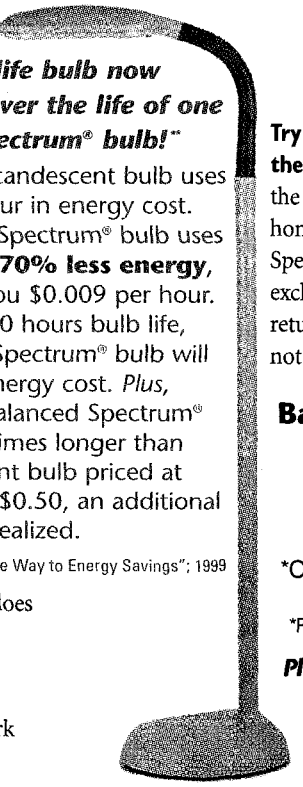

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hiring requirements, would use the authority of the state to seize several hundred acres of privately owned land. Freed from the shackles of bureaucracy, this new company would revitalize the shellshocked old city center. And if the 20,000 or so souls who lived or owned land downtown were upset at being forced to render it up, the company had a plan for them: The value of their claims would be determined by special committees—paid for, indirectly, by Solidere—that would award them compensation in the form of Solidere stock. If Kenneth Lay had been governor of Texas and granted Enron sweeping powers to seize Texans' homes and land, giving the homeowners nothing but Enron stock in return, it would have been something like Solidere.

To call Solidere's contract for the reconstruction of downtown Beirut a sweetheart deal is like calling Enron a troubled company.

To call Solidere's contract a sweetheart deal is like calling Enron a troubled company. Hariri was a major shareholder in Solidere, whose board of directors included his lawyer, his past and present employees and reportedly his Saudi business associates; at the same time, he was also the prime minister of the government that granted Solidere this extraordinary power to seize other people's private land. The deal was negotiated between Hariri's company, Hariri's government and one of Hariri's former employees, who was head of Lebanon's reconstruction authority. "One can thus assume that these 'negotiations' took place in a rather cordial atmosphere," Reinoud Leenders dryly notes in his forthcoming book *Divided We Rule: Reconstruction, Institution Building and Corruption in Post-War Lebanon*. This well-sourced and painstakingly footnoted investigation reveals how Solidere reaped millions (and possibly billions) that should have swelled the coffers of the Lebanese state—which today, with a rapidly rising $41 billion public debt, boasts one of the highest debt-to-GDP ratios in the world. Leenders—a former analyst for the International Crisis Group who teaches at the University of Amsterdam—combed through reams of financial reports and newspaper morgues in English, French and Arabic, carefully sifting through documents and depositions to critically evaluate the allegations of rampant corruption in Lebanon, including those about Hariri and Solidere. (Some of the most damning details in his book come from interviews with the company's own officials.) The result is a devastating indictment of Solidere, and of the man who founded and effectively controlled it.

Sadly, you won't find this depth of reporting in any of the Hariri biographies on the market. The best of these, Blanford's *Killing Mr Lebanon*, relies heavily on interviews with Hariri's retinue, turning occasionally to pro-Syrian lawmakers for "balance." Like Bob Woodward's early, fawning *Bush at War*, Blanford's book trades critical distance for access to power. The result is that while fast-paced and rich with contextual wisdom, *Killing Mr Lebanon* is essentially an oral history of March 14, the political movement made up of Hariri's party and its allies. (It's named after the gigantic rally in downtown Beirut one month after his killing.) Blanford's book glosses over Hariri's ruthless cronyism, giving short shrift to his legitimate critics, who are dismissed—in the rhetoric of the Hariri camp—as disgruntled dead-enders, carping "pro-Syrian" hangers-on and sectarian snobs who couldn't stomach a self-made Sunni.

There is some truth to this. The big landowners in downtown Beirut were from old aristocratic families; Hariri was an upstart from the provinces, a new-money Muslim who overstepped the traditional bounds of the city's Sunni mercantile elite. Hariri and his Saudi patrons were a threat both to Lebanon's entrenched confessional interests and the Syrian puppetmasters who manipulated them with such skill.

But it wasn't the big landowners who lost the most when Solidere seized their land. They had enough *wasta*—influence, connections, pull—to make sure they were well compensated, and enough cash to meet Solidere's byzantine requirements for keeping their homes, which only very few could afford. Rather, it was the middle-class entrepreneurs—the grocers, booksellers and restaurateurs who made the downtown economy thrive—who lost the most from Solidere's bizarre marriage of private capital and Soviet-style forced land collectivization.

And it's important to remember that for most of his political life, until Hafez al-Assad died in 2000, Hariri maintained excellent relations with the hegemon next door. During his days of complicity with Syrian domination over Lebanon, Hariri was more than willing to allow the Syrian regime's apparatchiks to attack his critics. Consider the case of Muhamad Mugraby, a human rights lawyer who represented the families of Lebanese citizens disappeared into Syrian jails.

Mugraby's father was one of the many small-business owners whose businesses had been demolished by Hariri's bulldozers, his little shops—vegetable stands, coffeehouses, butchers and other quintessentially Beiruti small businesses that had supported the family comfortably for decades—valued, he says, at a mere $20,000. Mugraby decided to fight back. He took on the cases of downtown property owners, including an elderly woman who he says was dragged out of her home by police so Solidere could demolish it; she died less than a month later, of what geriatric medical experts would refer to as "transfer trauma" and Mugraby calls "a broken heart."

Mugraby's troubles began when he questioned the murky legal authority of Solidere's special appraisal committees, headed by judges, set up to determine the value of people's property. While they issued legally binding decisions, they operated outside the judicial system's jurisdiction—effectively an extrajudicial court, indirectly underwritten by Solidere, whose decisions downtown property owners could not appeal. If that sounds uncomfortably close to "special military tribunal," it gets better. In October 1999, Mugraby denounced Solidere's indirect payment of the judges as a conflict of interest that influenced them to undervalue certain properties. When he expanded his crusade against corrupt judges, the Syrian-controlled judiciary struck back: He was accused of "dishonoring" the judiciary, banned from practicing law and thrown in jail.

Mugraby believes his persecution was punishment for his defense of downtown property owners. "They resented me very, very strongly," he says. "I'm sorry for that; I had nothing personal for or against Mr. Hariri."

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Bar Association all denounced the charges against Mugraby. Even the *Wall Street Journal* weighed in. Within Lebanon, however, many human rights activists kept silent: After what had happened to Mugraby, not to mention the Ayads, no one dared to go up against Hariri or his Syrian backers.

But if the Lebanese had to hide their anger, they felt it all the more. "It may now be that the city belongs to Solidere," said one furious critic, "but in twenty years' time its inhabitants will reclaim it."

On December 1, when Hezbollah and its allies flooded downtown Beirut, the statue of Riad Al-Solh, Lebanon's fez-wearing first prime minister, peered out from its pedestal in what could only have been bemusement: In his day, the Shiites

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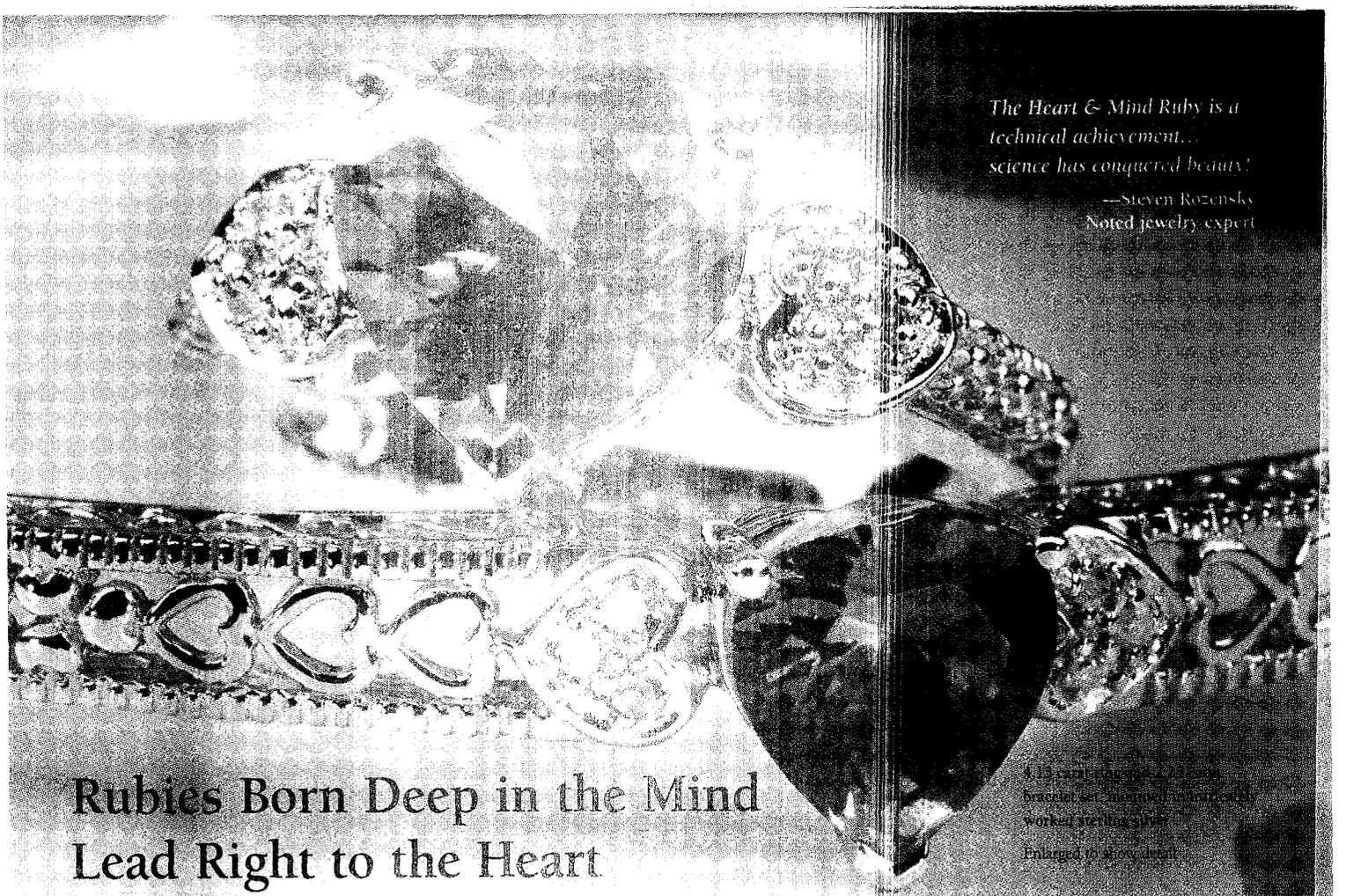

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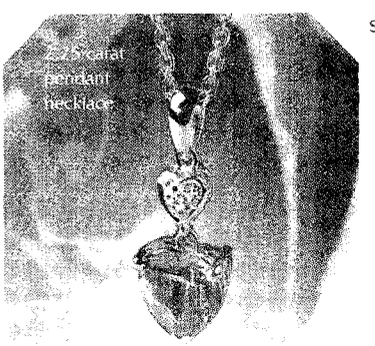

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knew their place, and it wasn't the capital. People traded text messages joking that the statue had miraculously come to life in order to hold its nose; another urged people to rally round their "beloved Virgin"—not the mother of Christ but the Megastore. "They're so grungy," sniffed one Western journalist, rolling her eyes at the protesters. "I just hope they don't mess up downtown."

In his seminal history of Lebanon, *A House of Many Mansions*, Kamal Salibi describes a country caught between two founding myths: a Sunni merchant republic tied to the Arab world through its great port cities and a Christian mountain stronghold protected by France. This dialectic between "Arabism" and "Lebanism" took many forms—East versus West, verticality (the mountains) versus horizontality (the sea)—but it was always conceived as a negotiation between Sunnis and Christians. "Lebanon's 'special identity' had represented a compromise between the Maronite idea of the mountain and the Sunni heritage of the city," writes Fouad Ajami in his luminous biography of Shiite cleric Musa al-Sadr, *The Vanished Imam*. "The Shia had to make their way between these two conceptions."

When the French appended the mostly Shiite hinterland to the newly independent Lebanon in 1943, the Shiites' numbers disrupted the delicate Muslim-Christian balance (Lebanon's government has not conducted a census for seventy-five years, afraid of what it might find). But despite their numerical superiority (which some of their adversaries dispute to this day)—and perhaps also because of it—the Shiites were always perceived as an inconvenience, Persianized outsiders, intruders in their own country.

They felt it. And that feeling of *mahroum*—of deprivation and dispossession—found powerful outlets: first in the Communist and pan-Arabist ideologies of the 1960s; then in political groups like Musa al-Sadr's Movement of the Deprived and its successor, the Amal Party; and eventually, after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in Hezbollah, which drew inspiration—and abundant support—from the Islamic Republic of Iran. With Iranian funding, the Party of God set up a parallel state that relieved the Lebanese government of much of its responsibility—military, financial and psychological—for its largest sect. They had their own clinics, their own schools and their own mosques, all in "their" neighborhoods. This autonomy came at a price: No matter how much power the Shiites attained, they were still unwanted, still the "grungy" peasants who belonged in the south or in "their" neighborhoods.

There was one place where everyone was welcome: downtown, especially the Bourj, as the central square was called (literally, it means "tower"). The Bourj was the vital center of Lebanon, the nodal point that linked the provinces to the capital and by extension to the rest of the world. Just as caravans connected to regional trade routes in the old preindustrial port city, the prewar downtown was a gathering place where all Lebanese could sample the pleasures of cosmopolitan life: They could watch movies, chase prostitutes, join in demonstrations, sell their tomatoes, buy used books or listen to a *hakawati*, a traditional Arabic storyteller, as Samir Khalaf writes in *Heart of Beirut*, a book infused with academic boosterism about the oppositional power of public space. (Khalaf teaches sociology at the American University of Beirut.) There were even informal coffee stands where Shiites from the villages along the Israeli border could congregate and drink coffee with other villagers, waiting for shared taxis to ferry them all back to their hometowns together.

The civil war, which turned downtown into the front line between rival militias, severed this artery connecting the hinterlands to the city. Instead of re-creating it, Hariri built something more exclusive: a playground for rich tourists, walled off from Lebanese hoi polloi by the plate glass barrier of money. Where Lebanese from all walks of life once bought secondhand clothes, luxury stores like La Perla now sold $100 thongs; instead of used textbooks, you could buy a Bang & Olufsen phone for $1,000. The new downtown still attracted visitors, but it filtered out the small-business owners and their customers, the unwashed masses whose "ominous influx," as Khalaf xenophobically describes the post–civil war refugees, had threatened the capital's delicate balance. Were it not for Solidere, sneered one of the company's board members, downtown property owners might have turned the area into "a kind of mega-shanty town."

Downtown is where all the fears and fantasies about this little country have always converged. You couldn't find a better symbol of the old Sunni-Christian competition, for example, than the gigantic Mohammed al-Amin Mosque. Always controversial, it was opposed by Christians because it overshadowed nearby historic churches. Today, it squats at the apex of a triangle, a holy trinity of church, mosque and megastore. When Hariri was killed, his family decided to bury him downtown, in a parking lot between the mosque and the megastore. Hundreds of thousands of mourners congregated at the gravesite. The result was an extraordinary popular uprising against Syrian rule, a semipermanent sit-in that sprang up around the gravesite and spilled over into Martyrs' Square, the historic agora where an Ottoman military ruler executed Lebanese nationalists in 1916. The "independence intifada" culminated on March 14, 2005 (not March 21, as Khalaf incorrectly dates it), in an enormous demonstration where hundreds of thousands of Lebanese cheered, waved flags and chanted, "Syria Out!"

The Western media made much of the demonstration's multiconfessional nature, but there was one sect notably absent: Shiites, many of whom had attended a Hezbollah-led rally on March 8 in a neighboring section of downtown. For most Shiites, downtown Beirut—and the ruling coalition that would take its name from the March 14 rally—had become a symbol of everything from which they felt excluded. Last summer's bloody war between Israel and Hezbollah, in which Israeli bombing leveled bridges, factories and entire villages, killing more than 1,000 Lebanese—mostly Shiite civilians—intensified the isolation of Lebanon's largest sect.

The 2005 uprising forced Syria to withdraw its troops after twenty-nine years of military presence in Lebanon. But it also split the country into a new clash of paradigms. Lebanese alliances are notoriously unstable, shifting with the slightest wind of political change. Today, the Sunnis have joined hands with their old competitors among the Maronite *zaims*, as well as the Druse followers of the formerly anti-American Walid Jumblatt, all of whom now look to the United States and Saudi Arabia for protection.

Meanwhile, their Shiite countrymen have forged a temporary marriage with the Maronite Christian supporters of former army commander Michel Aoun, who fought against Syria during the civil war. The general, whose followers were a driving force behind the anti-Syrian uprising of 2005, has now joined forces with Hezbollah, a party backed by both Iran and Syria. The rallying cry of this new and vehemently anti-American opposition—uniting the militantly Shiite Party of God with the mostly Maronite Aounists—is the ruling coalition's corruption and the country's crushing public debt, inherited by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora from his mentor, Hariri.

Today, downtown Beirut is divided once again. In December Hezbollah, Amal and Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, as well as some smaller parties, set up camp in the

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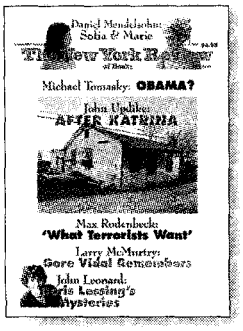

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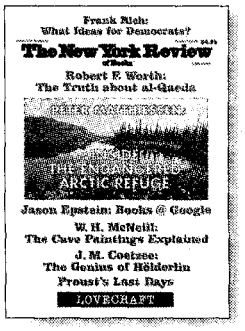

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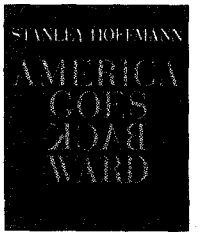

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heart of Hariristan, and they have vowed to stay there until Siniora's US-backed government steps down. Tent cities flowered overnight, each flying its own flag, subdividing Solidere's sovereign territory into ever-smaller statelets: Hezbollahstan, Aounistan, Communistan. Across a border of concertina wire, Siniora hunkers in his office, the old Ottoman-era barracks known as the Grand Serail.

The summer's war with Israel has politicized the postwar reconstruction of Lebanon once again, with money flowing in from various would-be patrons to repair the shattered infrastructure in exchange for political allegiance. Iran is pouring money into the Shiite south through Hezbollah; the United States and Gulf monarchies are lavishing funds on the Sunni-led government through a donor's conference held in Paris. Once again, Lebanon's political elite is poised to find salvation—and big, big money—in the reconstruction racket. And once again, Lebanon is facing the oldest, saddest choice in the modern Arab world: between undemocratic religious militants and a greedy, corrupt elite whose biggest selling point is its dubious ability to keep those militants at bay.

There was one man who might have resolved these competing visions of Lebanon: Hariri, who cultivated a close relationship with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Their friendship may surprise Westerners, especially as the Middle East sinks into Sunni-Shiite strife. But in Lebanon, it made perfect sense: Both were self-made *zaims*, powerful politicians, first among their equals. With Hariri around, Hezbollah would not have feared disarmament under Saudi and American pressure; and the Sunnis, with their powerful patriarch, would not have feared domination by the country's Shiites. Were he alive today, Hariri might have fixed the problem, at least temporarily, the way he always did: with money.

In the end, Hariri was no worse than any of the crooks who compose Lebanon's political class. In fact, his tragedy is precisely that he held so much promise to be different from the rest—few of them built anything enduring, however corruptly, or put kids through school—yet he ended up adopting their strong-arm ways. He outgrew his Syrian overlords and their Lebanese lackeys by beating them at their own game; and that, in the end, is very likely what killed him. He was a mythic figure, all right, as the books say. But by overlooking Solidere's corruption and its state-sponsored thuggery, they rob Hariri's story of its lurid greatness. Besides being more accurate, Hariri the big-hearted bandit is a much more interesting character than Hariri the martyr, the noble *shaheed* who gave his life to heal his war-torn country. Saints are boring; but as any *Sopranos* fan can tell you, a gangster who feels occasional flickers of conscience, sporadic signs of integrity, is a character well worth writing about. The book that would truly do Hariri justice would read less like a hagiography and more like the classic sagas of big-city political machines: Robert Caro's portrait of power-mad master builder Robert Moses, *The Power Broker*; and two masterly biographies of Chicago's legendary Mayor Richard J. Daley, Mike Royko's *Boss* and Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor's *American Pharaoh*. Hariri had far more in common with Daley Senior—the Mubarak of the Midwest, father of its current mayor and the man who, for better and for worse, reshaped the city's skyline and its politics—than the saintly statesman of popular myth. And despite his corruption, he held together a country that, without him, seems to be coming apart.

Beirutis have a saying about Hariri: *Ammar hajar wa dammar bashar*—he built the stones and destroyed the people. But my favorite obituary of Hariri is more charitable. It came from the mother of a friend of mine, an old woman who has seen decades of *zaims*, of warlords with the same last names, come and go. As we walked past the patch of seafront where the big man was killed, she shook her head. "*Hariri kaan mujrim, allah yirhamu*," she sighed, with ironic resignation—Hariri was a criminal, may God have mercy on his soul. ■

River Road

So you had your share of summer nights,
Cars braking along the river road—
the world still asleep yet alive with threat,
the high grieving sound of acceleration.

Beauty grew too fast, like your body,
ungainly, unfaithful. Along the river road
there were nodding lilacs. Every intersection
dangerous. Your life dangerous, but you

didn't know then how damage is made. Not
just the flipped chassis, spun apart into
anecdote—but night's notched velocity
ascending through a blue reservoir of scent.

No, to remember the inevitable in terms
of engaged, disengaged, gear to gear, one
heightening judgment—is to forget that back
then the worst happened each time it happened.

What was speaking loud over the figure on
the dash, that was God. Or not God—
something flashing past each roadside
presence: statue after gesturing statue
trying to reverse your belief in imagination

as the opposite of fate. Imagine a speed
at which you could make what was happening
not be true, a speed at which you could bargain
for it: that you, on fire, could be somebody else.

Carol Muske-Dukes

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Before the Law

VIVIAN GORNICK

ISAAC B. SINGER: A Life. By Florence Noiville. Translated by Catherine Temerson. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 192 pp. $23.

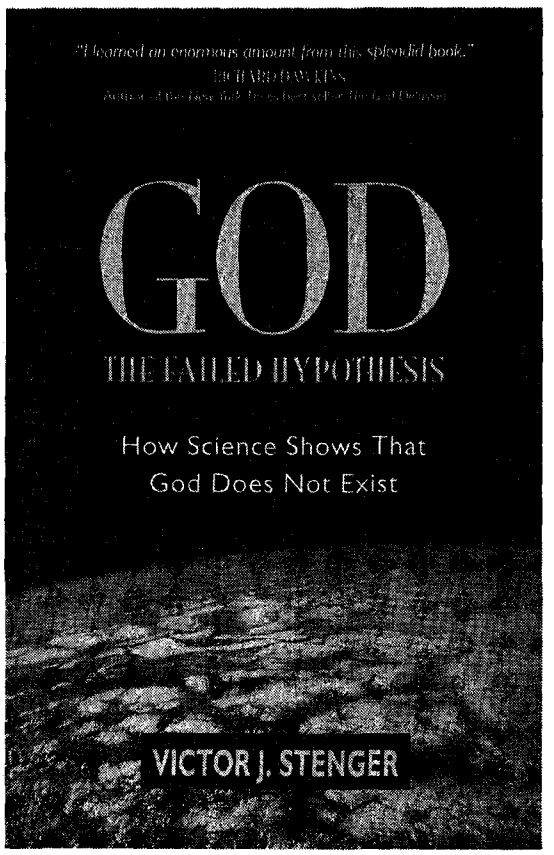
My mother's parents, both 16-year-old principals in an arranged marriage that took place in the synagogue of a small city in Ukraine somewhere around 1890, were surprised to discover on that first night together that they were sexually inflamed by each other; in fact, besotted. The mysterious pull both thrilled and frightened them. Although it apparently lasted a lifetime (my mother was the youngest of eighteen children), it was never alluded to in that pious house, much less spoken of. Married passion was the family secret. "Theirs," my mother often said, with a mixture of awe and admiration in her voice, "was a Bashevis Singer story."

She said this on the basis of the Singer stories that she had read in English. It wasn't that she couldn't have read them in the original Yiddish; it was rather that unless she bought the *Jewish Daily Forward*—which she wouldn't, she was too far left to read the paper Singer wrote for—she could read him only in the translated English. Singer never allowed his work in book form to be published in Yiddish. Everyone in the world read him either in or from the English translation. This practice allowed Singer to play with the idea that he had produced a twin set of literary works: the originals and the translations. He may have had something there.

The work in English—by Singer's own estimation—was cleaner, more economical and elegant, perhaps even more psychologically astute, than it was in Yiddish. By any reckoning he was extraordinarily lucky to have landed (in 1935) in the United States, where not only did he escape Hitler's Europe but twenty years later enchanted translators began to render his work in the rich, free American English that ultimately won him a place in world literature. But it is interesting to think that although he was passionately attached throughout his life to writing in Yiddish, he may have valued more what his work accomplished in English.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, the son of a rabbi, was born in 1904 in a village in Poland into, as he himself put it, "a stronghold of Jewish Puritanism"; that is, a shtetl culture wherein a religious Jew who was a man spent his entire waking life praying that he be found worthy enough to adore God; to deviate at all from the thousand and one rituals and strictures that represented this devotion was not only to forgo eternal salvation, it was to drift like a leaf in the wind in this world as well as the next. For the people among whom Singer grew, the secular world in any and all forms was a delusion and an abomination: One's physical being was simply a vessel of containment for the worship of God. His own father, Singer once said, was so unbodied that on his wedding day he could just as easily have married his mother-in-law or

Vivian Gornick is the author, most recently, of The Solitude of Self: Thinking About Elizabeth Cady Stanton *(Farrar, Straus & Giroux).*



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his sister-in-law, that's how little he registered the flesh and blood reality that surrounded him.

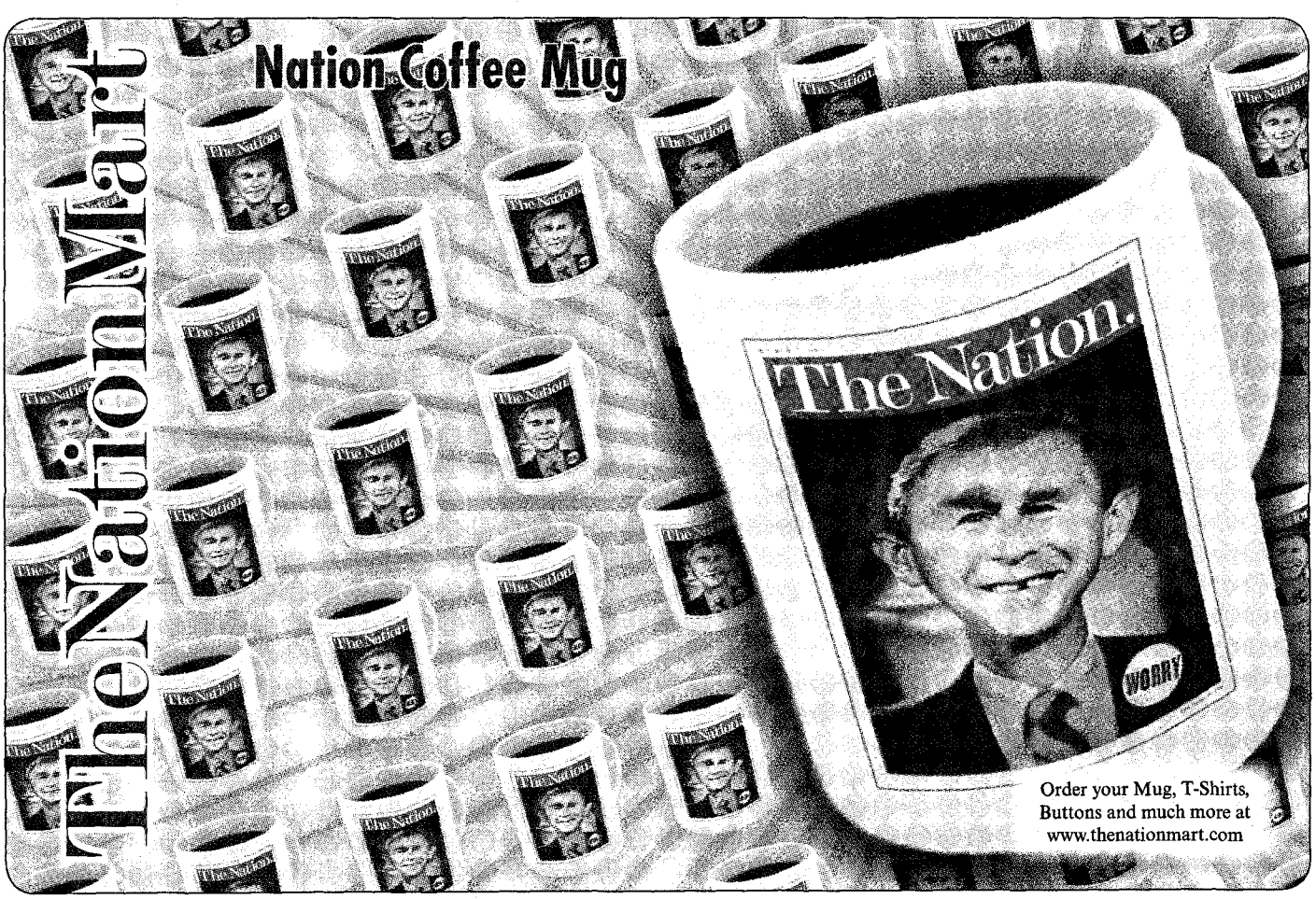
When Isaac was 4, the family moved to Warsaw. Here the Singers lived on a street that Isaac would make famous (Krochmalna Street), in a Jewish quarter so insulated from the rest of the city that, as one who'd lived there said, "It was possible to live your entire life without knowing ten words of Polish." At the age of 18, Singer realized that he could not commit to a life inside Orthodox Judaism: "I told my parents the truth: I didn't believe in the Gemara (rabbinical commentary in the Torah) or that every law in the Shulchan Aruch (the book of daily rituals) had been given to Moses on Mount Sinai; I didn't wish to become a rabbi; I didn't want an arranged marriage; I was no longer willing to wear a long gabardine or grow earlocks." He then left the quarter to go to work—through the intervention of his brother, Israel Joshua, eleven years older and already a known Yiddish novelist—as proofreader at a Yiddish magazine in what might have been called midtown Warsaw.

Though Singer mocked his lowly job in what his most recent biographer, Florence Noiville, infelicitously calls "the kitchen of literature," it was the necessary first step in the leave-taking of a life that would later prove to have been formative. Once out in the larger world, he quickly found his way to sensuality and the self-dramatization of repetitious remorse. A friend of that time remembered Singer as a bundle of contradictions: a secretive young man for whom the open pursuit of fleshly pleasure was both impossible and irresistible. He hungered, and he brooded. He could neither live without sexual experience nor forget the mystical power of Orthodoxy. The conflict was the making of him as a writer. The terms in which he rendered the conflict determined the sort of writer he would be.

As Singer understood it, his situation was the Dostoyevskian plight of the man who has lost God yet cannot accept that without Him life has meaning. This insight put him, potentially, in the company of other twentieth-century writers whose loss of faith had brought them to a bitter impasse; writers like Wallace Stevens, who described living in an age of nonbelief as "this iron solitude." But whereas Modernist writers could address the lost soul of contemporary man in the thought and language of their time and place, Singer was confined by the left-behind culture that permeated his being to an expressiveness that could not make use of New World models; better the Russians than T.S. Eliot.

He had indeed gained vital knowledge of our immutable inner divisions, the ones from which all of life's drama stems; but the idiom to which he was wedded—that of European *Yiddishkeit*—consigned him in the telling of his tales to the language of fable, in the writing of his novels to that of nineteenth-century realism. These combined elements of psychological savvy and storytelling that could be traced back a thousand years produced an unexpected twin consequence: They both guaranteed that Singer would never have to enter the place to which a hard-won secularism had brought most of the Western world, and they made of him an extravagantly admired original. A deep-rooted literary conservatism devoted to what he conceived of as the sacred power of emotional mystery took him, finally, all the way to the Nobel Prize. Reading him today, it is difficult not to register, with more than a little misgiving, the trade-off that his writing represents.

The stories number in the hundreds, and they are the work upon which Singer's reputation will ultimately rest. In many of the novels Singer allows himself long, conventional debates among his characters—reli-



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gious and philosophical—that drain the work of dramatic strength. The stories, on the other hand, are magic. In the hands of this master tale spinner, they become an embodiment of the mesmerizing ignorance with which all inner conflict is saturated. The sheer primitivism of our unknowing selves is cause for wonder. Stories like "Taibele and Her Demon," "Blood" and "Zeidlus the Pope" are astonishing not for where they take us (more often than not it's nowhere in particular) but for the richness with which characters who are driven by hungers they can neither name nor resist are brought to life. Usually it is sexual desire that is making them crazy; but sometimes it is the mad appetite for another kind of "forbidden" knowledge that accomplishes their requisite doom. "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy" is the great example here:

> After her father's death, Yentl had no reason to remain in Yanev.... She knew she wasn't cut out for a woman's life.... Her father Reb Todros, may he rest in peace, during many bedridden years had studied Torah with his daughter as if she were a son. He told Yentl to lock the doors and drape the windows, then together they pored over the Pentateuch, the Mishnah, the Gemara, and the Commentaries. She proved so apt a pupil that her father used to say:
>
> "Yentl—you have the soul of a man."
>
> "So why was I born a woman?"
>
> "Even heaven makes mistakes."

Yentl, as we all know, determines to right heaven's mistake. Out of her unholy need, she disguises herself as a man and becomes enmeshed in one surreal situation after another, until finally she has "committed so many transgressions that she would never be able to do penance." As the story moves toward its appointed end, all the principals suffer an increasing sense of dementia as Yentl's inappropriate desire forces on them an unwanted encounter with knowledge that brings them perilously close to a mental brink. Singer himself seems as frightened as his characters are of coming to consciousness: "Only now did Yentl grasp the meaning of the Torah's prohibition against wearing the clothes of the other sex. By doing so one deceived not only others but also oneself...the soul was perplexed, finding itself incarnate in a strange body." In short: To long for independence of mind is to risk outraging the cosmos even more so than the pursuit of sexual satisfaction.

Some readers may think Singer is being ironic; I do not. Singer is happy, not to say relieved, only when he can bring the story to a close with a nod in the direction of

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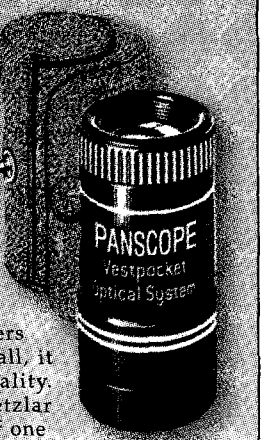

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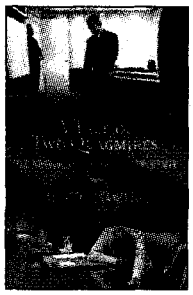

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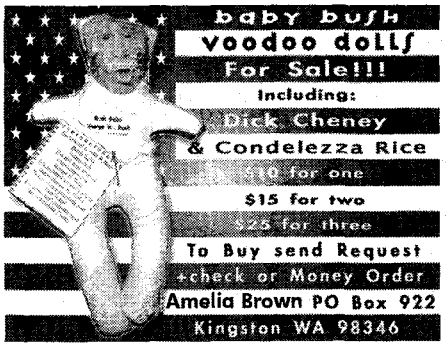

Judaic proscription. When Yentl pleads that she acted as she did only because "her soul thirsted to study Torah," the narrator shrugs, "All [her] explanations seemed to point to one thing: she had the soul of a man and the body of a woman." That's it. End of report. A woman studying Torah defies the ordained order of things, and although Yentl is as appealing a creature as Billy Budd, however sympathetic the cause of her trespass, she must be denied redemption. At the end of the day the Law is the Law.

Many of Singer's novels devolve on the same dilemma, only without the magic; and when at the end of their day the Law is the Law, the reader is left somewhat less than enchanted. In the stories, women and men alike are leveled by shtetl life: variously glorified, condemned or redeemed, in accordance with the requirements of the tale being told, while the author's touch—sure, light, authoritative—makes us yearn toward them all. In the novels, the settings are most often urban, the protagonists men, and the melancholy of soul-saving is pursued without humor or irony. Three of these novels in particular trace the extravagant suffering that is meted out to those who abandon the Law, even though they can no longer live by it: *The Family Moskat*, *Shadows on the Hudson* and *Enemies: A Love Story*. All have as protagonists the same wavering *luftmensch*, raise the same hand-wringing questions, come to the same dismal conclusion and—as women are invariably the instrument of temptation—leave the same trail of female destruction in their wake. But here, the reader feels an unmistakable absence of authority. The brooding power—indeed Dostoyevskian—necessary to sustain a book-length investigation of God, Man and World is simply not there. What we have instead feels derivative and uncertain: as though Singer does not know his own protagonist well enough to speak for (or of) him.

In *The Family Moskat*, set in Poland between the two world wars, Asa Heshel Bannet leaves the shtetl for Warsaw, wearing the long gabardine and earlocks of the Orthodox Jew. He had been a student of great promise—a seeker after truth that took him to secular as well as religious texts—but Asa's spirit had been uneasy (even tormented), causing his mind to enter a hovering state of indecisiveness from which he could not emerge: "But years passed and little came of his undisciplined efforts. He began courses of study but never completed them.... The eternal questions never gave him rest: Was there a God or was everything, the world and its works, mechanical and blind? Did man have responsibilities or was he accountable to no higher power? Was the soul immortal or would time bring everything to oblivion? In the long summer days he would...go off into the forest...and daydream. Each day he would make up his mind anew to leave the town, and each day he stayed." Finally the day does come. In Warsaw Asa instantly cuts off the earlocks, puts on a suit and wonders, "Is it here I will learn the divine truths? Among this multitude?"

The rest of the long novel (involving a cast of thousands) follows Asa as he spends the next twenty years struggling with these questions. The result is the same as in the shtetl: His legendary indecisiveness prevents him from making a life. Repeatedly, he finds himself living alone in furnished rooms, earning a marginal living, never fulfilling his intellectual promise, always seeking release in books—and in sexual passion. Along the way, he falls desperately in love with one woman, marries another, runs off with still a third, in the end ruining them all because—as is often the case with unformed women—each remains haunted by the poetic loser who, no sooner is she his, than he flees. It is Asa's estranged wife who finally delivers the authorial message: "It occurred to [her] that she had never been able to understand what it was that tortured him.... She was on the point of asking him, but suddenly she knew: he was not a worldly man by his very essence. He was one of those who must serve God or die. He had forsaken God, and because of this he was dead—a living body with a dead soul. She was astonished that this simple truth had eluded her until now." At the end, the Second World War has begun and Asa, who could have fled, walks back into the city as German bombs start to fall on Warsaw. Finally: no more choices.

In *Shadows on the Hudson*, set in New York in the late 1940s, the protagonist's name is Hertz Grein and, like Asa Heshel, "He had...dreamed of finding a book that would explain all secrets, unerringly reveal the right way. Every time Grein went into a library he searched for just this book.... What Grein sought did not and could not exist: he wanted the fear of heaven without dogma; religion without revelation; discipline without proscriptions." Hertz berates himself for having become a lapsed Jew who nonetheless cannot make a life in the world. Unable to give himself to work or family or spiritual devotion, he wanders from pillar to post, creating emotional chaos wherever he goes. He too runs frantically about among a

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wife and two mistresses, heaping abuse on himself even as he lusts after and lies repeatedly to each and every one. After 500-odd pages of an exhausting narrative in which Hertz endlessly rehashes God, Man and Worldliness; reviles Utopian Politics (Singer once said that God was everywhere except at a Marxist meeting); and realizes that he is a fool for seeking salvation in bed—he flees to Israel as one would to a monastery.

Enemies: A Love Story, the strongest of these books by far, also set in New York in the 1940s, tells of Herman Broder, a Holocaust survivor who, before the war, had also sought answers to the hard questions—he'd been a philosophy student in Warsaw—and had also been crippled by his own mysteriously demoralized will. The war, however, had solved the problem of a meaningful life, and now, in New York, Herman thinks of himself as one of the walking dead—even as he runs madly about the city among (again!) three women: living with his current wife (the Polish peasant who hid him from the Germans) in Brooklyn; sleeping with his passionate mistress (also a survivor) up in the Bronx; and drinking tea with his original wife (miraculously returned from the dead) down on the Lower East Side.

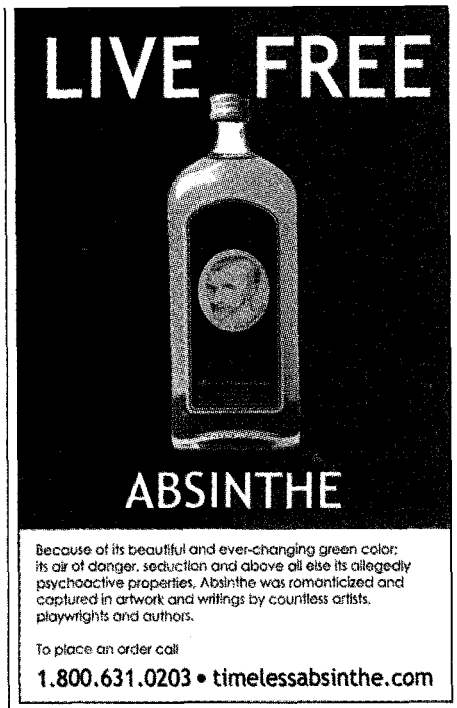
In this novel Singer successfully makes a metaphor out of the uselessness of having "survived" the Holocaust—these are truly people with leftover life to kill. Still: Herman is Asa and Hertz in spades. When Tamara (the first wife) and Herman find each other again, she questions him intently about his life with Yadwiga (the second wife) and Masha (the mistress). He hangs his head and tells her he doesn't know what he is doing, he just doesn't know. She stares at him and says, "You haven't learned a thing. Absolutely nothing." He agrees with her. He, too, thinks his perpetual "bewilderment" long precedes the war.

The house of cards finally falls in on Herman and he sits alone, experiencing a moment of terrified remorse in which he "had sworn to renounce all worldly ambitions, to give up the licentiousness into which he had sunk when he had strayed from God, the Torah and Judaism." The very next day, of course, the spineless Herman goes back on his own resolution. In the end, like Hertz Grein, he up and disappears, leaving Yadwiga pregnant, Masha dead and Tamara stunned. Maybe he joined Hertz in Jerusalem; maybe he's still hiding out in Cincinnati. Wherever he is, he is surely making life a living hell for himself and everyone who cares for him, as the devotion of Herman-Hertz-Asa to feeling scummy is boundless. Like the characters in Graham Greene's novels of lapsed-Catholic torment, Singer's, too, must go on sinking into a bottomless well of guilt, regret and the kind of elaborate self-revulsion that precludes any sort of rescue, either intellectual or psychological. That, finally, is the name of their game.

Having made the association with Greene, let me take it one step further. Upon rereading these novels of Singer's after many years away from them, I suddenly realized that a comparison with Greene feels more apt than with any other writer I can think of. While writers like Wallace Stevens really did—and do—address the immensity of "this iron solitude," Greene's writing often seems in service to a colossal piece of self-dramatization that compels him to make religious allegory out of bad character. I always feel Greene routinely beating his own self-deceived breast through the moral lapses that send his people spinning into the delicious despair they feel at living in a world bereft of God. It is the same with Singer in these novels. When Singer won the Nobel, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt wrote that Singer had made the Eastern European Jew "an exemplar of the suffering modern man who has been exiled from his divine inheritance." As the decades pass it becomes harder and harder to take seriously such an assessment. Singer once said, "I'm Herman, for good and for bad"—ostensibly with rue but actually, one suspects, with secret pride—and I remember thinking, "Ah, now we're coming closer to the heart of the matter."

If there's one thing the reader of a Singer biography wants, it is to get inside the passive-aggressive who said, "I'm Herman." What we want to know is: Who is he? How did he come to be? And how does that development illuminate the work? A flash of insight somewhere along these lines would, I think, provide a successful organizing principle for any book that purports to give us an I.B. Singer "Life." Unfortunately, in Florence Noiville's new biography we get nothing of the sort. Noiville is a French journalist with an astonishing predilection for hagiography. She absolutely adores Singer. For her, he can do no wrong.

Singer, apparently, had a character of monstrous complexity. Publicly he was seen as charming, folksy, unpretentious; whereas, by many accounts, he was inordinately vain, selfish and demanding. He betrayed friendships, discarded lovers, abandoned his one and only son. "But," his distraught biographer pleads on this last score, "at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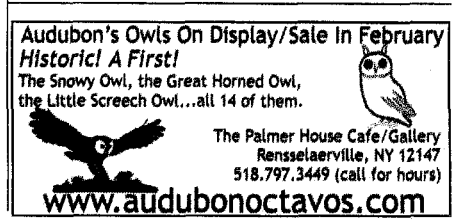
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least Singer was sincere and frank.... He refused to become mired in the sham of family bonds." Detailing many moments of really questionable behavior on the part of her protagonist, she is often content to forgo analysis, exclaiming, "But at least he was sincere!" Perhaps it is just a matter of bad writing—as a teacher of writing I know how bad writing and bad thinking complement each other—maybe that accounts for the low level of interpretive intelligence that informs this Life. Examples such as the following abound:

About living on Krochmalna Street: "What is most important about those years is that he attended the school of life."

On reading a diary description of Singer's thoughts at 13: "He was already the 'eternal outsider' forever at odds with his background."

Looking at a photo of Singer at 22: "One can almost imagine the four-year-old boy who was taught to read the Pentateuch and almost recognize the face of the future Nobel Prize winner."

These are the sentences of a myth-maker, not a biographer of honest or searching intent. The thing that is most wanted from a literary biography is neither endorsement nor denunciation of the artist but rather a narrative that will reveal the person who wrote the books. In the case of Singer, one would have appreciated most some insight into the writer who when he gained distance on his subject served his gift magnificently, and when he used himself as a model for the protagonist got lost in a mass of words that, ultimately, provided neither wonder nor clarity.

Singer was a man not so much divided against himself as ambitious to climb literary heights for which he did not always have the right equipment. He loved and read the Russians throughout his life. He took them as exemplars and mentors. On reading Gogol, he said, "How is it possible that this man who lived a hundred years before me has stolen so many of my stories?" And indeed, the Gogol in Singer truly wrote fantastically; it was he who had the capacity not only to capture but to inhabit, in all its glory and foolishness, the thrill of the lowest of the low imitating God through the unruliness of their passions, the chutzpah of their strange imaginings, the daring of transgression. The problem was Singer also read Dostoyevsky. When he was in the shtetl, watching lust and Torah chase each other around the village square, he was Gogol; when he was beating his lapsed-Jewish breast he was Dostoyevsky. The talent lay with Gogol. ■

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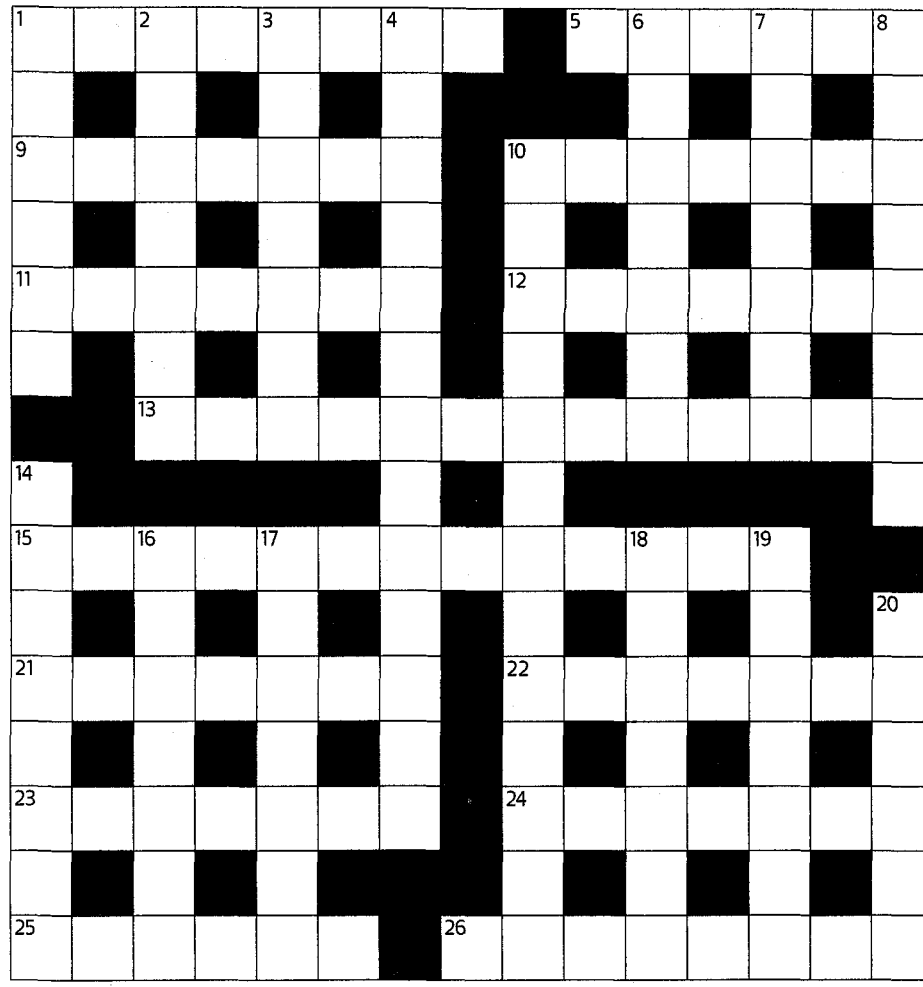

ACROSS

1 Desire just a way to act a bit wild? (8)

5 Comes back to be a bit under the weather, and possessed a flower. (6)

9 A sucker is said to be this all day. (7)

10 Came back hurting with the sign of spoilage, but they still might hope to throw the bull. (7)

11 It kept Berlin supplied in a time of shortage. (7)

12 Sort of hep, *inter alia*, to be outer points on a planet's flight. (7)

13 Proving a "no-hit" is coming and going very quietly, in a bit of trouble for one from Jackson, possibly. (13)

15 A burial place? Go back to it and supply some modern music/talk to that gal—one who may like to keep the writing secret. (13)

21 This wouldn't be an appropriate calling, if no man is an island. (7)

22 The clip seems to show what happens as a heavenly event. (7)

23 Enlightened if I educate someone to show it? (7)

24 The military may like to show off with them, but some like to take up arms to show them. (7)

25 The speech might bring such out, or playing a ukulele could, as well. (6)

26 Taking tea with this might be dramatic! (8)

DOWN

1 Sounds like only half of a North-west city could afford such a foreign workman. (6)

2 What happens when the uke gets broken has a patent application. (7)

3 What Darwin was concerned with alternately is about a requirement for a martini. (7)

4 A description of one with taking ways might not be heavy-handed, either. (5-8)

6 Plain-sounding, though tunes are "with it," made for high fliers. (7)

7 It's the old story—something to hang around your neck might be found on a rock. (7)

8 Doesn't have anything to do with those muscles you see displayed on TV—it's an awful ending. (8)

10 In the manner of things you can see through, hurried in the up-street, with Mom or Pop lying, at first. (13)

14 One of these will happen to a very small measure showing one sign of a minor fender-bender. (8)

16 A religious school? Certainly the greeting goes to state briefly what makes it. (7)

17 Having the effect of what one might be doing with the story. (7)

18 Sick over the capital of Texas, in dance, as some say—from which you can view a lot of the country. (7)

19 Togetherness, even though it's a way to knock the wine offered. (7)

20 In the manner of what supposedly went pop! (6)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3070

	P	A	R	T	N	E	R	S		H	I	P	S	
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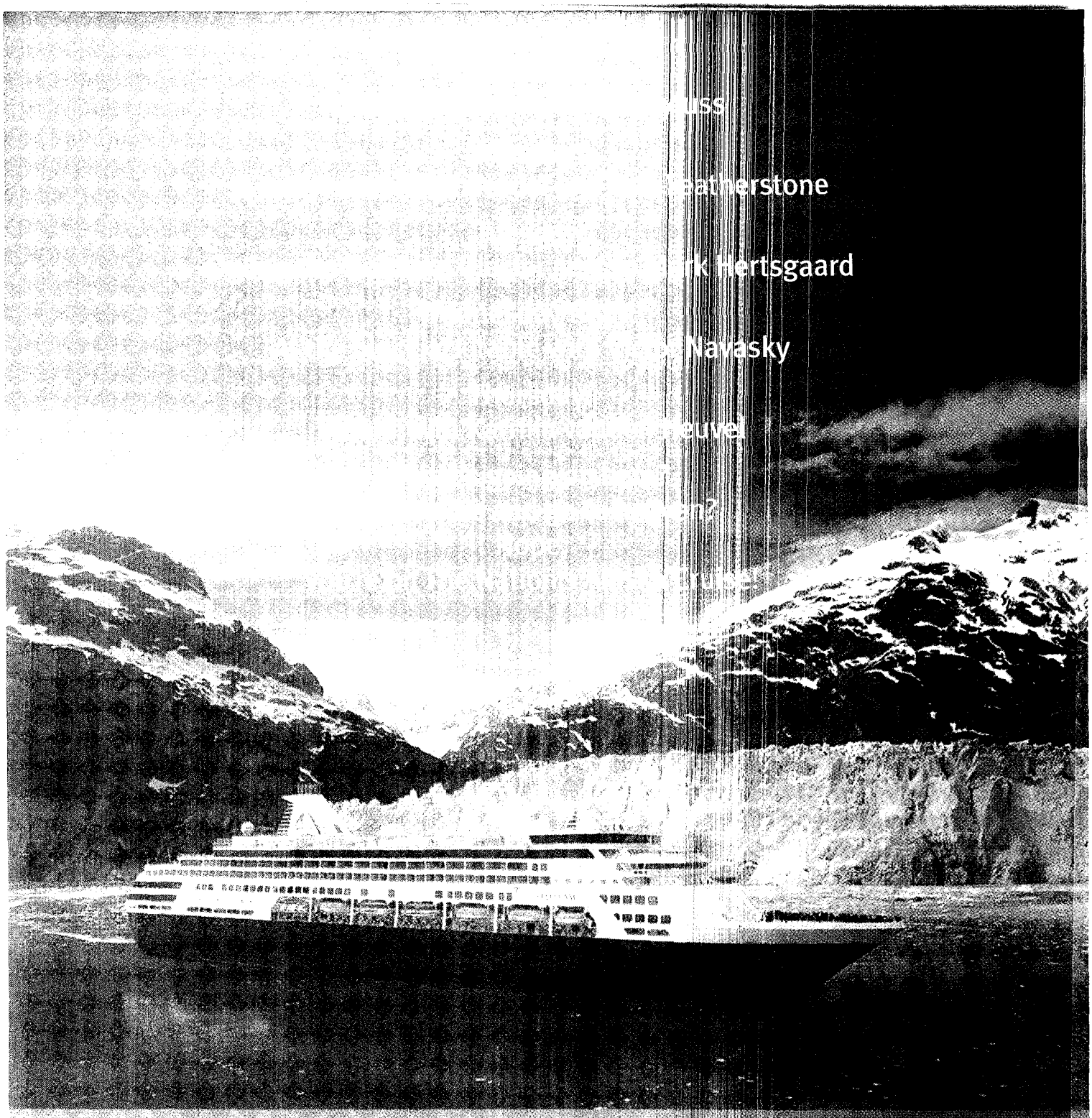

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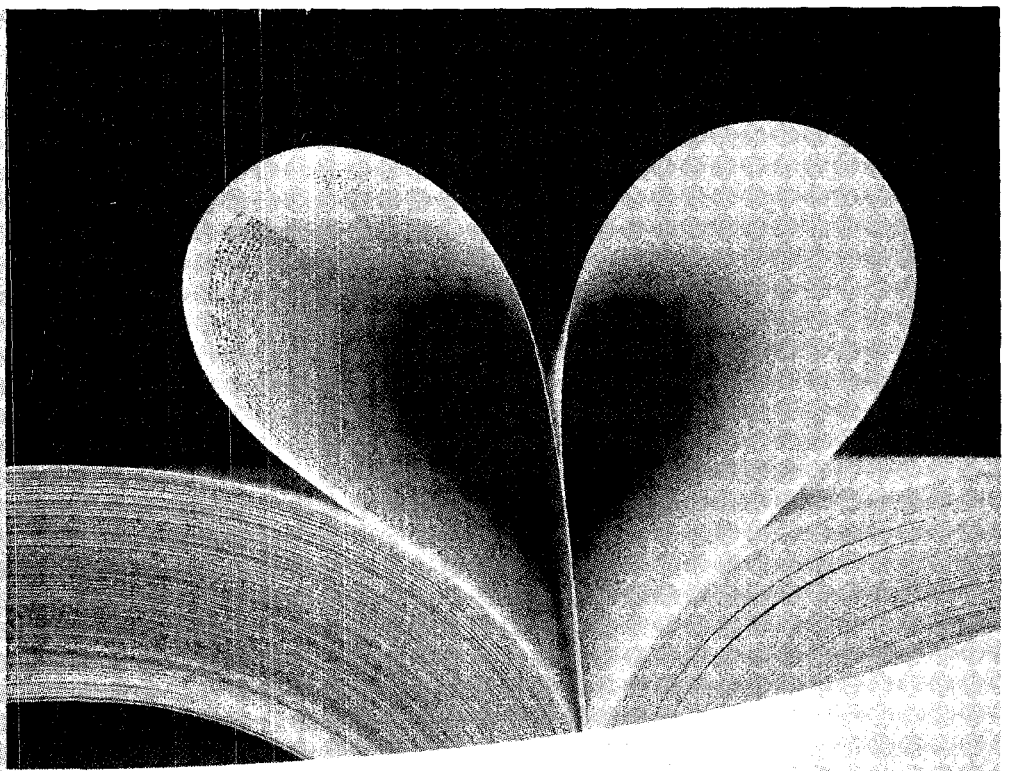

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